

# **THE EXPERIENCES OF HEADERS OF CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS IN THE GREATER SEKHUKHUNE DISTRICT OF THE LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

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## **DEDICATION**

“It takes a village to raise a child”

*African proverb*

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## SUMMARY

South Africa has many child-headed households that are forced to fend for themselves in their daily struggle to make ends meet.

When caregivers leave their families - due to socio-economic challenges, illness, or death - relationships diminish, and caregiving disintegrates. This would often result in a minor sibling having to take over the role of an adult caregiver to care for and protect the rest of the household.

The Children's Act 38 of 2005 determines that children in child-headed households may be in need of care and protection and that such households must be investigated by a social worker to establish if they need care and protection. If it was found that there was no need for care and protection, the social worker must take measures to assist the children with counselling, prevention, and early intervention services.

It was found that immediately after being left as headers of their households, headers took on a caregiver role to provide support, to care for, and to protect their siblings. Other findings were that headers of child-headed households shared their daily household responsibilities with their siblings, and that headers of child-headed households needed food, shelter, and clothes to improve the daily lives of their households. It was also found that headers were economically vulnerable because they had no stable income, while they still had to take care of their households. A further finding was that although headers of child-headed households were responsible for their households, they still managed or tried to attend school alongside their siblings. It was also established that headers of child-headed households were unaware of their rights or any alternative options available to them, and of social services that could have been rendered to them. It was established that headers of child-headed households generally had difficult and challenging experiences characterised by parental or adult care deprivation. It was deducted that the provisions made for child-headed households in the Children's Act of 38 of 2005, as amended (Act 41 of 2007) is not executed in practice.

It is recommended that the South African government take all necessary measures to promote the rights of the headers of child-headed households and to prevent that they are discriminated against by being forced to take up social roles normally reserved for

adults. It is also recommended that social workers must adhere to the requirements of all appropriate legislation pertaining to service delivery to child-headed households, by implementing measures that will assist child-headed households, by providing counselling, mediation, prevention and early intervention services, family reconstruction and rehabilitation, behaviour modification, problem solving and referral to other suitably qualified persons or organisations.

## **OPSOMMING**

In Suid-Afrika is daar talle huishoudings met 'n minderjarige aan die hoof wat daaglik sukkel om kop bo water te hou.

Wanneer versorgers hul families verlaat - hetsy weens sosio-ekonomiese uitdagings, siekte, of dood - verswak verhoudings en word versorging afgeskeep. Hierdie gebeurtenis veroorsaak dikwels dat 'n minderjarige broer of suster die rol van die versorger oorneem ten einde vir die res van die huishouding te sorg en om hulle te beskerm.

Die Kinderwet 38 van 2005 bepaal dat kinders in huishoudings met 'n minderjarige aan die hoof, moontlik versorging en beskerming nodig het en dat 'n maatskaplike werker ondersoek moet instel na sodanige huishoudings om vas te stel of daardie huishouding versorging en beskerming nodig het. Indien vasgestel word dat dit nie nodig is vir sorg en beskerming nie, moet die maatskaplike werker die nodige stappe neem om die kinders van die huishouding by te staan met berading, voorkoming, en vroeë ingrypingsdienste.

Daar is gevind dat, in die tyd onmiddellik nadat die versorger die huishouding verlaat het, die minderjarige hoofde die rol van die versorger oorneem om vir hulle broers of susters te sorg en te beskerm. Daar is ook gevind dat die minderjarige hoof hul dag-tot-dag verantwoordelikhede met hul susters en broers deel en dat die minderjarige hoof 'n behoefte het aan kos, skooling, en klere om die lewens van sy gesinslede te verbeter. Voorts is vasgestel dat die minderjarige hoofde ekonomies kwesbaar is aangesien hulle nie 'n vaste inkomste verdien nie en steeds na hul gesinne moet omsien. Daar is ook opgelet dat, alhoewel die minderjarige hoofde verantwoordelik is vir hul gesinne, hulle dit regkry of poog om steeds skool te gaan saam met hul broers of susters. Dit het na vore gekom dat die minderjarige hoofde van huishoudings onbewus was van hulle regte en enige ander opsies wat tot hulle beskikking was, asook van maatskaplike dienste wat aan hulle gelewer sou kon word nie. Dit is duidelik dat minderjarige hoofde uitdagings in die gesig staar weens die ontneming van ouerlike of volwasse sorg. Daar is afgelei dat die bepalings van die Kinderwet 38 van

2005, soos gewysing deur wet 41 van 2007, in praktyk nie toepas word vir huishoudings met 'n minderjarige persoon aan die hoof nie.

Dit word aanbeveel dat die Suid-Afrikaanse regering alle moontlike stappe moet neem om die regte van minderjarige hoofde van huishoudings te bevorder en daar moenie teen die minderjarige hoof gediskrimineer word nie deur te verwag dat hulle bloot die volwassene se verpligtinge sal oorneem. Voorts word aanbeveel dat maatskaplike werkers moet voldoen aan die bepalings van alle wetgewing te make met dienslewering aan huishoudings met 'n minderjarige aan die hoof deur maatreëls in plek te stel wat die huishoudings met 'n minderjarige aan die hoof sal help by wyse van berading, mediasie, voorkoming en vroeë ingrypingsdienste, gesinshereniging en herstel, gedragsverandering, probleemoplossing en verwysing na ander toepaslike persone of organisasies.



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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 PRELIMINARY STUDY AND RATIONALE**

Worldwide there are many households that are headed by a child or children. This issue affects many countries such as India, Russia, Uganda, and Zambia. In India, it has been recorded that many children are struggling to survive as they live on their own in child-headed households. They are forced to fend for themselves on the streets and form part of an ever-increasing number of unprotected, poorly socialised, and under-educated young people (India HIV/ AIDS Alliance, 2006:1-58). Russia is another country where there are few alternatives available for children who have been abandoned or are without families. Children who are not able to grow up in a stable and well-adjusted family setup, sometimes become street children and are then often confronted with poverty, ill health, and violence (Humanium, 2016:1-8). In Africa, countries such as Uganda and Zambia face similar social issues, as orphaned children find themselves living in child-headed households without a parent or guardian to care for them (Kipp, Satzinger, Alibhai & Rubaale, 2010:297-309). In Zambia, for instance, the structures of families have been transformed by HIV/AIDS causing an increase in child-headed households (Chama, 2008:4-31).

The South African 2001 census indicated that of 11.2 million households in South Africa, nearly 100 000 were headed by children (Statistics South Africa, 2004:16-110). In a 2002-survey it was found that 1.5% of households in South Africa were headed by children between the ages of 12 and 18 years (Tsegaye, 2007:10). Moreover, between 2002 and 2007, nearly 2000 coloured child-headed households emerged in South Africa (SAIRR, 2009:1). According to the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR, 2009:1), the number of children in child-headed households in South Africa increased from 118 000 in 2002 to 147 500 in 2007, an overall increment of twenty five percent in five years. The social profile of South Africa between 2002 and 2009 reflects that the proportion of child-headed households has remained virtually unchanged between the abovementioned years (Statistics South Africa, 2009:3). More recent statistics from South Africa's General Household Survey show that in 2015 there were about 90 000 children in 50 000 child-headed households,

while in 2017 there were about 58 000 children living in a total of 32 000 child-only households across South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2015:8). This equates to 0.3% of all children (Statistics South Africa, 2017:135). The above data from Statistics South Africa reflects a steady decline in the number of child-headed households from 100 000 in 2001 to 50 000 in 2015 and 32 000 in 2017. However, Hall and Sambu (2018:135) argue that while children living in child-headed households are rare relative to those residing in other household forms, the number of children living in these extreme situations is of concern.

In 1989 the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Phillips, 2011:249-256). The UNCRC calls all members of society to observe the rules it has set out and clarifies that this requires the amendment of domestic laws to comply with the UNCRC (Newell, 2005:245). Gras (2001:51) emphasises that the UNCRC calls for children to be protected from harm and provided with assistance in time of need to ensure that their basic needs are responded to and that they are given the opportunity to participate in matters that concern them. In section 3 of the UNCRC it is maintained that the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children (Sloth-Nielsen, 2004:6). It is highlighted that the child should be protected and provided with the necessary care, while considering the rights and duties of the parents, legal guardians, or individuals legally responsible for the child (Arts, 2010:14). Section 18 adds that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child and that state parties must utilise their best efforts to ensure that both parents recognise this principle.

The South African Constitution, in line with the UNCRC, highlights the importance of ensuring that children are looked after by their parents. Chapter 2 of the Constitution of South Africa, the Bill of Rights, points out that every child has the right to family or parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment (Republic of South Africa, 1996:13-15). A child is in alternative care if the child has been placed in foster care or in the care of a child and youth care centre following an order of a court, or in temporary safe care, or placed for adoption to provide permanent care in a family (Republic of South Africa, 2007:167-179; Lim, 2009: 218). However, Lim (2009:111) explains that according to the United Nation

guidelines, alternative care should be used only when it is necessary and only in suitable forms that meet the individual needs of children.

In section 150 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (Republic of South Africa, 2005:63-66) different situations that characterise children in need of care and protection are identified. The Children's Act recognises child-headed households, amongst others, and elaborates that children in child-headed households may be in need of care and protection. The Children's Act also determines that it is possible that children in child-headed households are not necessarily in need of care and protection, but that children in such households must be investigated by a social worker who should establish if the children still need care and protection (Republic of South Africa, 2005: 63-66). The Children's Act further states that if, after the investigation, it was found that a child is not in need of care and protection the social worker must where necessary, take measures to assist the child with counselling, prevention, and early intervention services. Thus, it is the task of the social worker to monitor and determine whether the best interests of the child are served in terms of the Children's Act because according to this act, both the care and protection of children in child-headed households are the responsibility of social workers (Van der Westhuizen, Roux & Strydom, 2012:467-481).

Phillips (2011:267-268) recognises the importance of parents taking care of their children and argues that families must stay together to take responsibility in the upbringing and development of their children. However, Seepamore (2016:571-584) highlights that many families in the Global South are inclined to split in order to survive the complex socio-economic conditions in which they find themselves. In South Africa, for instance, labour migration as well as the consequential distance parenting, are both still deeply rooted in society. Authors Mogotlane, Chauke, Van Rensburg, Human and Kganakga (2010:24-42) state that with the HIV/Aids epidemic, many children are left destitute and orphaned. These are some of the circumstances that many South African families face and that normalised the occurrence of split families which often led to the unfortunate creation of child-headed households, where children are compelled to look after themselves and in many cases to execute parental responsibilities (Mogotlane et al., 2010:24-42).

According to Human and Van Rensburg (2011:959-966) the experiences of children in child-headed households include being forced to adopt the adult role of supporting the family, of frequently being responsible for their own food supply, for financial management, and school attendance. A process, Muyomi (2012:193-207) explains, that includes responsibilities which are not appropriate for the children's developmental age. Literature points out that orphans and other affected children tend to face every kind of abuse and many risks, including being infected with HIV/Aids. Furthermore, Alpaslan and Nziyane (2011:117-136) add that being sexually abused is one of the many experiences children in child-headed households are exposed to. Literature also mentions that many children are forced into exploitative and dangerous work, including exchanging sex for money, food, protection, or shelter. Maqoko and Dreyer (2008:717-731) mention that with the need to care for their siblings, many children must work in unfavourable conditions. In addition, Muyomi (2012:193-207) explains that these children often end up suffering from numerous psychosocial challenges as a result of exposure to child labour.

The absence of parents in the formative and teenage years of their children's lives could diminish family relationships and lead towards failure to form and sustain a sense of unity and mutual purpose (Madziva & Zontini, 2012:428-443). In agreement, Ngconjana, Kwizera and Umejesi (2017:8160-8180) add that among other negative effects of child-headed households is the fact that they affect the development, wellbeing, and realisation of human rights for the children that reside in them. Authors such as Sloth-Nielsen (2009:113-135) and Mentjies, Hall and Sambu (2015:102-106) demonstrate that child-headed households are viewed as a violation of children's rights to protection, survival, development, and participation. Furthermore, Evans (2011:348-396) holds the view that the practice whereby children take care of other children or even adults, is a challenge to the universal models of childhood as a shielded life phase free of adult responsibilities.

The above makes it clear that children in child-headed households face many challenges. However, existing studies tend to focus on the challenges of the households in general and not specifically on the experiences of the headers of these households. Research acknowledges that studies have been undertaken in the area of child-headed households, however, these studies are extremely limited with most

of them (Nziyane, 2012:290-305; Ngconjana et al., 2017:8160-8180 & Van Dijk & Van Driel, 2009:915-927) not looking into the experiences of headers of child-headed households but rather at the realities of orphaned children living in child-headed households, livelihoods in child-headed households, as well as state intervention and support of child-headed households respectively.

It is important to explore the experiences of headers of child-headed households as their experiences could contribute to the body of knowledge regarding childcare and protection. Furthermore, it is significant to gain more insight about the headers because they are taking on the roles and responsibilities of adults and will therefore have a unique experience. Gaining insight into the experiences of headers of child-headed households could also enable social workers to understand them better and develop services to support them. This study is likely to be the first research about the experiences of headers of child-headed households from the headers' perspective in the Greater Sekhukhune District of the Limpopo Province. It is clear that inadequate attention has been given to this major social challenge in South Africa, hence the study of the experiences of headers of child-headed households is crucial. The researcher proposes to gain an in-depth understanding about the experiences of headers of child-headed households.

## **1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

An important characteristic of child-headed households is that the children who reside in them usually have their rights heavily compromised (Le Roux-Kemp, 2013:1-8). Moreover, research about child-headed households is lacking as Gow and Desmond (2002:83) highlight that there is not much information regarding child-headed households. Maqoko and Dreyer (2008:717-731) add that available information on child-headed households is limited while Van Dijk and Van Driel (2009:915-927) maintain that reliable statistics about the number of child-headed households are lacking as information is inadequate regarding the social issue in South Africa and other African countries. Research regarding child-headed households has to a large extent focused on the effects of the HIV/Aids epidemic on child-headed households as well as the challenge of poverty and other societal issues (Chidziva & Heeralal, 2016:91-102).

With reference to the abovementioned research, the problem formulation of this study is that there is insufficient research about the experiences of headers of child-headed households who are ultimately responsible for the household and who must take on adult responsibilities. Therefore, for social workers to understand the type of support services the headers of child-headed households need, they must gain insight into their experiences. The Children's Act determines that South African social workers are the cornerstone of the child-protection system and are responsible to investigate cases of children who may need care and protection. This study would thus be able to assist social workers in their delivery of the required services when they examine children and headers of child-headed households who may be in need of care and protection (September, 2007:93-102). The researcher is of the opinion that conducting a study focusing on the experiences of headers of child-headed households in the Greater Sekhukhune District of the Limpopo Province will address part of the gaps in existing research and ultimately provide a more comprehensive understanding about the plight of headers of child-headed households, as well as the services they need to support them.

### **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION**

#### **1.3.1 Research question**

The study aims to answer the following main research questions:

What are the experiences of headers of child-headed households?

### **1.4 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES**

The goal of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding about the experiences of headers of child-headed households. The objectives to achieve this goal are:

- To explore and describe policy and legislation and the circumstances pertaining to child-headed households in the South African context from a rights-based perspective.
- To describe the needs and challenges of child-headed households and the social services needed.
- To explore and investigate the experiences of headers of child-headed households and the services rendered to them by service providers.

- To present conclusions based on the collected data and provide recommendations to social workers, the Department of Social Development, the general public, and advocates for children's rights.

## **1.5 THEORETICAL POINTS OF DEPARTURE**

The study moves from the point that children should enjoy all their rights as enshrined in the South African Constitution. Amongst these rights, is the right to family care, parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment (Republic of South Africa, 1996:13-15). The United Nations Children's International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (2010:63-76) mentions that children who cannot live with their parents should still be allowed to grow up in a loving home and enjoy all their rights. Relevant to the study, Strode and Grant (2011:5-18) highlight that the law generally views children as a vulnerable population, lacking in decision-making capacity, and in need of protection and care.

The study adds that children's rights are compromised in child-headed households. It further maintains that the normalisation of this social problem and awarding it legal recognition is an infringement of children's rights. Thus, the study utilises the rights-based perspective as a core theoretical underpinning. The offices of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2004:4-35) and UNICEF (1998:2-30; 2004:91-93) both define the rights-based perspective as a conceptual and organisational framework ensuring that the human rights principles are reflected in programme and policy initiatives at both local and national levels.

The utilisation of the rights-based perspective in this study is necessary in that it will aim to reflect the inconsistency of policies meant to protect the rights of children in South Africa. Strode and Grant (2011:5-18) explain that the UNCRC recognises children as rights holders who are entitled to participate in society to the extent their evolving capacities allow them to. It further identifies the duties and obligations of those against whom a claim can be brought to ensure that rights and entitlements are realised. The framework defines the relationship between the right holder and duty bearer and outlines mechanisms by which duty bearers can be held accountable (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2004:10-22). In the context of the rights-based perspective, rights holders are identified as those who are entitled to

claim rights, including vulnerable groups such as women, children, elderly people, and persons with disabilities. The primary duty bearers are the state, non-state actors, as well as service providers (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2004:22).

Through utilisation of the human rights principles of universality, indivisibility, interdependence, equality, and non-discrimination, the framework helps identify individuals and groups that are marginalised or excluded, or that are at risk of marginalisation or exclusion, and guides implementation of remedial strategies. The value of the rights-based perspective lies in the transformative potential of human rights to highlight and alleviate injustice, inequality, poverty, as well as other forms of vulnerabilities (UNICEF, 1998:2-30). A more in-depth account of the rights-based perspective is discussed in Chapter 2 of the study.

## **1.6 CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS**

For the aim of the study, the following concepts are clearly defined:

### **1.6.1 Child**

The Children's Act 38 of 2005 (Republic of South Africa, 2005:63) and the Constitution of South Africa define a 'child' as any individual under the age of 18 (Republic of South Africa, 1996:13).

### **1.6.2 Child-headed households**

The official definition in the Children's Act defines a 'child-headed household' as a household headed by a person under the age of 18. It includes situations in which these children need to take care of a terminally ill adult living in the same home (Republic of South Africa, 2005:65).

A child-only household in the study is defined as a household whereby the header of a child-headed household is between the age of 19 and 22 years and has been caring and looking after the children in the household from when the header was under the age of 18 years.



### **1.6.3 Headers or caregivers or head**

A 'header,' or 'caregiver,' or 'head' can be described as the person primarily responsible for the day-to-day running of the household, including childcare, breadwinning, and household supervision (Van Breda, 2010:259-280). Headers are individuals who look after children and have looked after children from when the headers were under the age of 18. The headers can be in school or out of school and can be between the ages of 19 and 22 years. The aim of the study seeks to put focus on the header who is the caregiver in the household and who understands the experiences of being the header of a child-headed household.

### **1.6.4 Experiences**

A person's 'experience' is about what actually happens to that person. It can further be defined as the actual living through an event or real life as contrasted with the ideal or imaginary. Experience is the sum total of the conscious events that compose an individual life (Erlach, 2003:1125-1147).

### **1.6.5 Greater Sekhukhune District (Limpopo Province)**

Sekhukhune is a district of the Limpopo Province, the northern-most part of South Africa. The district has a few main urban centres and is largely rural. It is located outside major towns with Pretoria at approximately 200 km to the south, Nelspruit at about 150 km to the east and Polokwane at about 180 km to the north (Official Guide South Africa, 2017:2).

## **1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This section of the study will briefly focus on the research approach, research design, sampling, instrument for data collection, and data analysis.

### **1.7.1 Research approach**

The research made use of a qualitative research approach. The utilisation of this approach gave participants the opportunity to share their experiences, challenges, and opinions which led to an in-depth understanding about the research enquiry. Utilising a qualitative research design enhanced the study in that this particular design considers that there are multiple realities that different cultural groups construct on the

basis of their world views or value systems, therefore the perceptions of headers of child-headed households was understood in that manner (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delport, 2011:142-144).

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001:53) the qualitative research approach is about describing and understanding human behaviour instead of explaining and predicting human behaviour. The study understood the experiences of headers of child-headed households through the perceptions of headers residing in those households. A qualitative research approach was proposed to the study in order to produce data that is rich, descriptive, contains personal experiences and reflections, and that shares participants' stories in their own voices to give insight into their viewpoints. The application of qualitative research was necessary because according to Bless, Smith and Sithole (2013:58), there is information that cannot be recorded adequately using quantitative data. The authors add that language provides a far more meaningful way of recording human experience and because the qualitative research approach provides exactly that, it was utilised in the study. Additionally, the study utilised inductive reasoning when the empirical data was collected and the researcher began by observing the empirical world and reflected on what is taking place (De Vos et al., 2011:49).

### **1.7.2 Research design**

In this study the researcher incorporated explorative and descriptive research designs. Kreuger and Neuman (2006:23) explain that exploratory and descriptive research designs vary in many aspects. Blaikie (2000:52-69) clarifies that exploratory research entails gaining insight into a situation, a phenomenon, a community, or an individual. The study made use of exploratory research design in order to have basic information about the experiences of headers of child-headed households. Moreover, Mentjies, Hall, Marera, and Boulle (2010:40-49) highlight the importance of tracking child-headed households over time to explore their experiences. The design was chosen because it gave the researcher the opportunity to acquire new information through the exploration process.

The study also utilised descriptive research design in order to intensively examine the phenomena and its deeper meaning to lead to a further description (De Vos et al.,

2011:96). It is stated that descriptive research presents a picture of the specific details of a situation, social setting or relationship, and focuses on the “how” and “why” questions (De Vos et al., 2011:96). This research design was chosen because it described the study accurately. Descriptive research design was further utilised to describe the experiences of headers of child-headed households as well as the possible social work services needed.

### **1.7.3 Sampling**

A sample is defined by De Vos et al. (2011:223-224) as comprising of elements or a subset of the population considered for actual inclusion in the study. The authors add that sampling is studied in an effort to understand the population from which it was drawn. Non-probability sampling, specifically purposive and snowball sampling were used in the study. Non-probability sampling was employed because the odds of selecting a particular individual were not known as the researcher did not know the population (De Vos et al., 2011:231). Purposive sampling was firstly used to inform an understanding of the research problem by putting in place inclusion and exclusion criteria and also asking the community leader to recruit potential participants (De Vos et al., 2011:392). It should be noted that snowball sampling was used later in the study when there was limited access to appropriate participants for the intended study (De Vos et al., 2011:233). Snowballing involves approaching a single case that is involved in the phenomenon to be investigated in order to acquire information on other similar individuals (De Vos et al., 2011:233). The sample types were effective in the study because the researcher had limited knowledge about the population.

The study population included headers of child-headed households from the Greater Sekhukhune District in Limpopo Province as it is the second poorest of the nine provinces in South Africa, (KwaZulu-Natal being the poorest) and as it is predominantly rural in nature with almost 90% of its 5.5 million people living in rural areas and 60% (3.3 million) of the population living in poverty (Makofane & Gray, 2007:201-207). In addition, an analysis of child-headed households in the 2017 General Household Survey revealed that about three quarters of child-headed households can be found in the former homelands, mostly in Limpopo, Mpumalanga, and the Eastern Cape (Hall & Mokomane, 2018: 36-37). Furthermore, the abject

poverty that characterises many rural communities in Limpopo, as well as in the rest of South Africa, has resulted in families that normally leave their homes and some of their family members behind in search of economic opportunities. These families are known as migrant families and they are prevalent in the Greater Sekhukhune District of the Limpopo Province.

Sekhukhune District Municipality is situated within the south east of Limpopo Province, about 300 km north of Johannesburg. It is bordered by Gauteng Province to the south, Mpumalanga Province to the east as well as Waterberg towards the West. It comprises of four local Municipalities, namely: Elias Motsoaledi, Ephraim Mogale, Fetakgomo-Tubatse and Makhuduthamaga. It is characterised by a scattered pattern of human settlement and contains a large number of rural villages (roughly 605) with both limited economic infrastructure opportunities and services of a reasonable standard. The quality of the roads is not of a high standard, and the lack of accessibility to many areas impedes development. The rural villages lack both economic bases and services of a reasonable standard. Overall, the Sekhukhune District Municipality covers approximately 13 264 km<sup>2</sup> with only 5% of the district's population estimated to live in urban areas (Official Guide South Africa, 2017:2).

The researcher obtained the contact numbers of community leaders from the Sekhukhune District Municipality website. The process of introducing the study to the community leader commenced with the researcher calling the leader in charge of the community committee. Formal introductions were made, and it was explained to the community leader that the researcher is originally from the district. The researcher then provided details about the research project and clarified what the project entails. Furthermore, the researcher's interest to interview headers of child-headed households between the ages of 19 and 22 years via telephone interviews, was shared with the community leader. Since the researcher was not familiar with the population size or the members of the population, and since the researcher had no information about the different families in the community, participants were acquired firstly through the utilisation of purposive and later snowball technique.

The researcher requested the community leader to assist in informing potential participants about the research project. Due to the disruptive impact of the COVID-19

pandemic and the subsequent national lockdown, the researcher sent confidential letters through courier services to the community leader (Appendix D) alongside the informed consent forms (Appendix A). The community leader was then requested to hand deliver the confidential letters sent to potential participants' households as well as the informed consent forms on behalf of the researcher to inform them that the researcher was interested to interview headers of child-headed households between the ages of 19 and 22 years via telephone interviews. The community leader was also requested to store the documents in a locked cabinet and courier all the completed informed consents alongside copies of all the participants' identify documents or birth certificates to the researcher as the participants were told to deliver the documents by hand to the community leader. The documents arrived safely to the researcher without any disturbances. The hand-delivered confidential letters contained the researcher's contact details. Potential participants freely chose to text, call, or email the researcher when they wanted to partake in the study. The researcher was aware of the power dynamics between community leaders and community members and how the latter could feel pressured to partake in the study when the message was from the community leader. The researcher mitigated the challenge by expounding to the community leader that potential participants should not be coerced into participating in the study when confidential letters were delivered to them and that they should be genuinely told that they have the freedom to choose to partake or not, without any penalties. Furthermore, the confidential letter hand delivered to potential participants by the community leader also stipulated that potential participants could choose whether to be in the study or not and that no one should pressure them into participating in the study (Appendix D).

The researcher then made preliminary telephonic contact with potential participants who responded to the delivered confidential letters. During the conversations, the participants were in possession of their confidential letters (Appendix D) and their informed consent forms (Appendix A). During these telephonic conversations, the objective of the study was explained, as well as the content and meaning of the informed consent forms (Appendix A) and interview schedules (Appendix B). The researcher also clarified to the participants that completed informed consent forms should be hand delivered to the community leader so that they can be sent back to

the researcher alongside copies of their identity documents or birth certificates as proof that they were not minors. Arrangements were then made for a follow up contact to conduct the semi-structured interview.

By using snowball sampling, the participants were asked to put the researcher in contact with other participants who fitted the criteria and who may have been interested to take part. Participants were informed that they could pass the researcher's number along with information about the research to potential participants rather than provide the researcher with potential participants' contact numbers. Participants were told that they needed to receive permission from their connections to share their contact number with the researcher. The sample size was not determined at the onset of the study but was determined by data saturation.

The criteria for inclusion in the sample of the study was that the header of the child-headed household must be:

- between the age of 19 and 22 years and have been caring and looking after the children in the household from when the header was under the age of 18 years.
- living with the children in the house and responsible for the day to day running of the household.

Potential participants were screened beforehand through utilising the inclusion criteria. The researcher explained to the participants that minors were not allowed to participate in the study. Furthermore, they were asked to provide their age and they were encouraged to be honest for the sake of transparency. They were also asked to send copies of their birth certificates or identity documents to the researcher alongside the informed consent forms. This process ensured that no minors were recruited. Moreover, participants were told that they needed to be between 19 and 22 years of age to partake in the study.

The following people would have been excluded from the sample of the study:

- Anyone without the experience of being a header of a child-headed household.
- Anyone who did not reside with children in child-headed households. However, four of the participants who came forward to be interviewed were living on their

own, however, they clearly identified with the definition of a child-headed household as they were taking care of themselves and as they regarded themselves as being the head of an only child household. These participants were therefore interviewed and the reasons for including them in the study is explained in Chapter 4.

- Anyone younger than 19 and anyone older than 22 years of age in order to avoid minors partaking in the study and also to prevent widening the inclusion criteria so that the criteria can remain to have participants who became household headers while they were younger than 18 years of age and were still household headers at 22 years of age.

#### **1.7.4 Instrument for data collection**

Data collection took place in the form of telephone interviews as face-to-face data collection was suspended by the Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee (REC) due to the COVID-19 lockdown and social distancing protocols. The study made use of a semi-structured interview schedule during the telephone interviews with headers of child-headed households (Appendix B). The duration of each telephone interview was between half-an-hour to one hour. Even though no face-to-face interviewing was possible it can be said that telephone interviews are of equal value as face-to-face interviews as this method is used increasingly across different fields of research and as sensitive topics could still be investigated using this method (De Vos et al., 2011:355). The researcher further structured the gathering of data to move from general to specific aspects to acquire relevant information. This method of data collection was appropriate in that it did not only describe the experiences of headers of child-headed households but also let the headers reflect on their experiences (De Vos et al., 2011: 342). The telephone interviews were conducted from the researcher's own personal room in a university residence, which was entirely appropriate for conducting telephone interviews, and that had adequate network connection with minimal disturbances.

### **1.7.5 Data analysis**

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data (De Vos et al., 2011:397). The study utilised a qualitative approach, therefore the data collected was analysed qualitatively. Babbie (2007: 3780) defines qualitative analysis as the non-numeric examination and interpretation of observations for the purpose of discovering underlying meaning and patterns of relationships. The study made use of thematic analysis by pinpointing, recording, and examining patterns within the data which was presented through narratives (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013:398-405). The following process as informed by Creswell (2007:150-155) was utilised in the study to record and analyse the data.

The interview between the researcher and the participant was audio-recorded and observed with less intrusion. The interview was on speaker mode and field notes were made to ensure that all information was collected. The researcher further transcribed the data collected during interviews into a word processing package. This process involved having to decide what level of detail was necessary with regards to the interpretation and representation of the data (De Vos et al., 2011:406-407). Moreover, the researcher coded the collected data into themes by looking for similar words or phrases mentioned by the participants during the interviews. Once the words and phrases were highlighted, they were put into themes, sub-themes, and categories (Creswell, 2007:150-155). The themes, sub-themes, and categories were presented in a table and the narratives of participants were used to describe and illustrate the data collected.

#### **1.7.5.1 Method of data verification**

The criteria for a research study should be established to ensure that the quality of the data can be verified (De Vos et al., 2011:172). The criteria should refer to the reliability and validity of the research study. According to Bless et al. (2013:221) reliability is concerned with the extent to which the observable (empirical) measures that represent theoretical concepts are accurate and stable over repeated observations, while validity is concerned with just how accurately the observable measures actually represent the concept in question or whether in fact, they represent something else. Therefore, different criteria must be used to evaluate the quality of the data collected and



analysed in terms of the two approaches, either quality of quantitative research or quality of qualitative research (Bless et al., 2013:220). Since the study was a qualitative study, the quality of a qualitative research study was evaluated through its trustworthiness, on the basis of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

- Credibility

Bless et al. (2013:236) state that credibility corresponds to the concept of internal validity, since it seeks to convince that findings depict the truth of the reality under the study, in other words that they make sense. In the research study, the researcher met the criteria by indicating a theoretical framework in Chapter 2 to add to the credibility of the study.

- Transferability

According to Bless et al. (2013:237) transferability can be compared to external validity since it refers to the extent to which results apply to other. De Vos et al. (2011:177) explain that transferability refers to whether the results from empirical findings can be transferred to other settings. The findings of this study could be transferred to other research on child-headed households and the recommendations could be useful for children in child-headed households and social workers alike.

- Validity and reliability

Validity refers to the truthfulness of the conclusions that are made from a research endeavour and reliability is focused on how reliable measures are (Bryman, 2012). Validity and reliability were ensured in the study as the researcher randomly chose to call two of the participants (Participant 1 and 7) that took part in the study and informed them about the overall findings of the study (Chapter 4), they were then given the opportunity to state their view on whether they agreed with the findings that the researcher shared from the study. Both participants informed the researcher that they agreed with the findings of this study. To further ensure validity and reliability, the researcher requested a suitable independent coder to read through the researcher's transcriptions and empirical chapter as the independent

coder had sufficient knowledge about the phenomenon, knew the community, and as she was originally from the community. The independent coder was also a registered social worker with the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP). In addition, the independent coder had experience as a social worker in child and family welfare and was busy with a postgraduate degree in Social Work, as a result confirmed the themes, sub-themes and narratives (Appendix F).

- Dependability

Dependability demands that the researcher thoroughly describes and precisely follows a clear and thoughtful research strategy (Bless et al., 2013:237). In the research study, the researcher ensured the dependability of the research by ensuring that the collected data was presented in a logical, organised, and systematic manner. The researcher ensured that findings from the empirical investigation are well documented. Furthermore, both international and national research articles were utilised in the study to allow for a dependable research study.

- Conformability

The conformability of a research study requires that other researchers or observers should be able to obtain similar findings by following a similar research process in a similar context (Bless et al., 2013:237). To add to the conformability of the research study, the researcher made use of participants' narratives with minimal changes from the study to conform to previous studies on the same topic.

- Reflection of the researcher on self-awareness, influence on the participants, and the research process

The researcher is a registered social worker and has experience in child and family welfare from undergraduate work. During the study, the researcher examined and managed his own feelings regarding the study by discussing all feelings with the supervisor. The researcher did not know the participants that participated in the study and did not have any relationship with them. The researcher recognised that minimal attention has been given to the social problem of child-headed

households. This made the researcher interested in enquiring about the social problem in order to understand it better, gather information, and raise awareness of the research problem.

## **1.8 ETHICAL CLEARANCE**

According to Bless et al. (2013:25) one of the reasons why social scientists are so concerned about research ethics is that there have been many cases of abuse of people's rights in the name of social research. De Vos et al. (2011:114) elaborate that ethical guidelines also serve as standards and a basis upon which researchers must evaluate their own conduct. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Departmental Ethics Screening Committee (DESC) of the Department of Social Work at University of Stellenbosch and the Research Ethics Committee (REC) before the commencement of the study (Appendix E). The research was classified as a medium risk, as defined in the Stellenbosch University Guidelines for the Departmental Ethics Screening Committee (DESC) of September 2012. This medium-risk classification was given because the experiences of headers of child-headed households were expressed in the study, because the study included vulnerable social categories which looked at controversies, and because some of the information shared in the study was sensitive and private and required some sort of trust between the researcher and the participants.

The researcher informed the participants that their decision to participate in the study was based entirely on their choice and that they could choose to discontinue at any stage during the research process. A clear explanation of what was expected from the participants was discussed in order to give them the opportunity to make an informed choice to voluntarily participate in the study. The informed consent form (Appendix A) was sent to the participants beforehand with an explanation of the purpose and goals of the study. The informed consent forms were sent through courier services alongside the confidential letters. Potential participants were told during the initial contact that they would have to take their completed informed consent forms to the community leader so that these could be couriered back to the researcher. The potential risks, discomforts, and the option of debriefing, were discussed in detail. Moreover, the benefits of the study were clearly explained to the participants, alongside the fact that

no payment will be given to them for partaking in the study and that they will only be given R29 mobile airtime voucher for gratitude. The researcher ensured that participants' information would stay private and that access was restricted by keeping the transcriptions in a locked safe. Transcriptions were also safeguarded on the researcher's personal computer with a password that is known only to the researcher as well as on the Microsoft One Drive.

The researcher informed the participants about matters that could be sensitive to them, such as sharing their experiences about their family background, daily challenges, and everyday functioning. The participants were also informed about how sharing information could make them feel when the information is private or about issues that could make the participants uncomfortable, for instance the loss of parents, or the financial status of the participants, amongst others. Providing this essential information enabled participants to continue with the study knowing what might transpire. The researcher also discussed the option of debriefing with the participants and mentioned that should any emotional harm occurs as a result of shared experiences, debriefing would be arranged with the allocated social worker, Mrs K. T. Nkobo (Appendix C). None of the participants suffered emotional harm and therefore had no need to be debriefed after the interview.

Confidentiality implies keeping something private (Oxford Dictionary, 2017). Thus, making a commitment that all data and information of the participants with regard to confidentiality is handled very privately. In the context of this study, only the researcher was aware of the identity of the participants. Confidentiality was maintained, and the identities of the participants were not used in any compromising manner or to the disadvantage of the participants. This information was communicated clearly to the participants. Therefore, participants were referred to in the study as participant 1, 2, etc. All the information regarding ethics and professional conduct by the researcher was communicated to the participants before the commencement of the study.

## **PRESENTATION**

The research is presented as follows:

- Chapter one - Research introduction
- Chapter two - First objective - Description of the policy and legislation and the circumstances pertaining to child-headed households in the South African context from a rights-based perspective.
- Chapter three – Second objective – Description of the needs and challenges of child-headed households and the social work services needed.
- Chapter four – Third objective - Exploration and investigation of the experiences of headers of child-headed households and social services rendered by service providers.
- Chapter five – Fourth objective – Presentation of conclusions based on the collected data and provision of recommendations to social workers, the department of Social Development, the general public, and advocates for children's rights about the experiences of headers of child-headed households in South Africa

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **POLICY AND LEGISLATION AND THE CIRCUMSTANCES PERTAINING TO CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT FROM A RIGHTS-BASED PERSPECTIVE**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Songca (2011:340-359) highlights that initially in South Africa, there was no comprehensive or specific law dealing with children. However, the first Children's Act came into operation on 18 May 1937 (Jackson, 2018:32-37). Then later the current South African Government made a series of national and international commitments to protect the wellbeing of children (Hall & Wright, 2010:45-69). These include different legislative developments such as the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa approved by the Constitutional Court on 4 December 1996 and that took effect on 4 February 1997 and the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (Jackson, 2018:32-37). Songca (2011:340-359) adds that South Africa also ratified several international instruments relating to children, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). In addition, Hall and Wright (2010:45-69) contend that there is a need for further investment in the lives of children and their families as the objectives of the abovementioned policy documents have not been clearly realised for many children in South Africa.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe policy, legislation, and the circumstances pertaining to child-headed households in the South African context from a rights-based perspective to achieve the first objective of the study. The chapter begins by describing the international (UNCRC) and regional (ACRWC) policy provisions regarding rights of children to care and protection. This is followed by a description of South African policy documents for the rights of children, focusing on the Constitution of South Africa, the Children's Act 38 of 2005, the Children's Amendment Act 41 of 2007, the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997), as well as the White Paper for Families (2013). Furthermore, a brief description of childcare and protection within the South African context and with emphasis on what constitutes a child in need of care and protection and the best interests of the child will be provided, as well as a description of the

circumstances pertaining to child-headed households. The chapter will conclude with a description of the rights-based approach to child-headed households with focussing on the care and protection of children in child-headed households.

## **2.2 INTERNATIONAL POLICY AND LEGISLATION – UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1989 and is a universally agreed upon set of non-negotiable standards and obligations that deals with the needs and rights of children worldwide (UNICEF, 2010:81-98). Since its adoption, the UNCRC has become the most ratified human rights treaty in history (South African Human Rights Commission, 2011:40-56) and apart from being the cornerstone of children's rights globally, it is a legally binding instrument exclusively devoted to children (Lim, 2009:97). On 16 June 1995, South Africa ratified the UNCRC and became legally bound to implement it. With this ratification of the UNCRC, children's rights were given the force of international and domestic law and because the UNCRC is premised on the basis that children are born with fundamental freedoms and the inborn rights of all human beings, but with specific additional needs because of their vulnerability, these fundamental freedoms of children are to be expected.

Section 20 of the UNCRC further articulates that a child that is temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment, or in whose own best interests cannot be allowed to remain in that environment, shall be entitled to special protection and assistance provided by the state. This section is based on the understanding that children receive a lot of social, physical, and psychological security from parents and that, when parents are absent, assistance should be provided as the lack of this assurance could cause a child to feel handicapped, uncertain of its own abilities, and fearful (Muyomi, 2012:193-207).

In South Africa child-headed households are households who do not have adult caregivers, but who generally try to operate the same as normal families. This means that a child would be working to support siblings, get food, clothing, and shelter. This child must also deal with the emotional wellbeing of household members. It also means that the government is not giving these child-headed households the special

protection and assistance they are entitled to in terms of the UNCRC (Hall, Richter, Mokomane & Lake, 2018:36-37). It would furthermore be difficult to satisfy the needs of child-headed households, especially when there is no income with which to sustain the family nor any special protection from the state (Hall, et al., 2018:36-37).

### **2.2.1 General principles of the UN Convention**

The realisation of children's rights relies on the UNCRC's main principles which include non-discrimination, best interests of the child, right to life, and development and active participation (UNICEF, 2010:92-94). The abovementioned principles are crucial in understanding how the UNCRC can be fully implemented to have a positive effect on the care and protection of children. The UNCRC further recognises that for a full and harmonious development of a child's personality, the child should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love, and understanding. By complying with the UNCRC and adopting its goals and principles Hall and Richter (2018:23-28) state that South Africa strengthened its commitment to give high priority to children's issues. However, twenty-five years after ratifying the UNCRC, South Africa is still exposed to a unique challenge of child-headed households where children go through life without adult caregivers to give them care and security, leaving these children extremely vulnerable

The general principles of a rights-based perspective are integrated in the UNCRC. Based on the rights-based perspective, human rights may be the most effective way to reduce or eradicate injustice while advancing human dignity and welfare. The South African Human Rights Commission (2011:40-56) adds that there can be no doubt that the UNCRC has transformed the way children are viewed today as it is building a foundation for a world where all rights for all children can be realised. Within this context it is expected of South Africa to implement the UNCRC by effectively responding to the rights of, amongst others, the extremely vulnerable children of child-headed households whose rights are undoubtedly infringed. In the following section the general principles of the UN Convention will be discussed.



### **2.2.1.1 Non-discrimination**

Section 2 of the UNCRC (1989) highlights the principle of non-discrimination and points out that state parties “shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present UNCRC to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind” (UNICEF, 2009:9). The power and responsibility of state parties is identified in the principle of non-discrimination whereby it is emphasised that the state needs to protect children against all forms of discrimination and to take all necessary measures to promote their rights. Lang (2008:1) emphasises that children are the most vulnerable citizens in any society and the greatest of our treasures and with the principle of non-discrimination assuring the promotion and protection of children’s rights, the state has a role to play in protecting children against all forms of discrimination. In the case of child-headed households, Muyomi (2012:193-207) clearly states that children in child-headed households are discriminated against as they are denied a sense of childhood and become vulnerable as a result. Discrimination against these children occurs when they have to take up social roles normally reserved for adults while simultaneously being forced into adulthood compared to children who grow up in stable families that are characterised by special adult care, love, and understanding.

### **2.2.1.2 Best interests of the child**

The best interests of the child principle requires state parties to ensure that child protection and care is available to promote children’s wellbeing with more focus on the rights and duties of parents or other individuals legally responsible for the child (UNCRC, 1989:42-53). Children’s best interests should therefore be considered in relation to all actions concerning them. The principle places an obligation on decision makers and law and policy makers to always consider whether a decision will have an impact on a child’s life and to assess the possible challenges and possibilities of how these challenges can be eradicated to promote the wellbeing of children (UNICEF, 2009:9).

The best interests of the child principle is also applicable to children in child-headed households. The question is whether it is in the best interests of children in child-headed households to stay together without adult care? Motihar (2007:2) argues that

the wellbeing of children in child-headed households is not promoted, and that the realisation of their rights is forfeited due to the challenges they are exposed to, such as a lack of food, being absent or dropping out from school, and child labour. It can therefore be concluded that there is a possibility that the best interests of children in child-headed households could not be met or satisfied as their wellbeing is compromised without adult or parental care.

### **2.2.1.3 Right to life and development**

Another important principle is that every child has the inherent right to life and that state parties must ensure the survival and development of the child (UNICEF, 2009:9). Blokland (2011:12) emphasises that it is the obligation of the state and other duty-bearers to make sure that the child's survival and development is guaranteed. Apart from having the right to life, children also have a right to the maximum available resources that are necessary to support them in order to achieve their possible potential (UNICEF, 2009:9). However, children from child-headed households could find it difficult to access resources without the support of their parents.

As seen from the above the child has the right to development, but in child-headed households the development of the head child could be compromised due to the fact that this child has to take responsibility for the running of the household and the care of the children. Therefore, literature states that it is extremely difficult for adolescents to assume the adult role of raising younger siblings after the primary caregiver has died. In fact, these are adolescents who themselves still need love and security but who had to deal with a parent's illness and death before being catapulted into adulthood with no adult guidance. They are furthermore exposed to multiple difficulties whilst they cannot develop optimally as their rights to basic education, nutrition, healthcare services, and social services are dishonoured (Nziyane & Alpaslan, 2012:290-305).

In South Africa social workers must investigate whether children in a child-headed household are in need of care and protection, and where necessary, social workers must take measures to assist the child, including providing counselling and mediation to ensure age-appropriate development (Republic of South Africa, 2005: 64-69). Social workers play a crucial role in delivering social services to children in the areas

of partial care, early childhood development, prevention and early intervention, protection, foster care, adoption and child and youth care centres, to ensure the children's right to life and development.

#### **2.2.1.4 Active participation**

Section 12 of the UNCRC clearly identifies the importance of active participation and mentions that children who can form their own views must be given the opportunity to express those views freely in all matters affecting them (UNICEF, 2009:9). In addition, their right to actively engage and express their views should not be infringed, meaning that children should be provided with the opportunity to be "heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting them, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law" (UNICEF, 2009:9).

According to Petrén and Hart (2000:43) there is a balance between protection, care, and freedom, hence the child's role to participate as provided in section 12 is linked to the child's evolving capacities and best interests. Children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions considered when adults make decisions that affect them. The importance of parents listening to their children and clearly communicating is crucial as it leads to a better understanding of the issues children are exposed to (South African Human Rights Commission, 2011:58).

The challenge facing children in child-headed households is that they live by themselves, therefore they do not have the opportunity to communicate their challenges to adult caregivers (Van Dijk & Van Driel, 2009: 915-927). These children are in need of a voice to help them articulate their needs (Maqoko & Dreyer, 2008: 717-731). Within this context the importance of advocacy in societies should not be underestimated as advocacy can promote a better legal framework to overcome the barriers that children living in child-headed households face (Sloth-Nielsen, 2004:37). From the above discussion it is clear that children in child-headed households go through life without the direct involvement of their parents, they are generally vulnerable and unheard, therefore it is vital for them to be given the freedom to express their thoughts and feelings about issues that affect them. Therefore, social workers

rendering services to children in child-headed households should make sure that they keep the active participation principle in mind.

## **2.3 REGIONAL POLICY AND LEGISLATION – AFRICAN CHARTER ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD**

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) (1990) of which South Africa is part (Couzens & Zaal: 2009:299-320), recognises the child's need for protection and the entitlement to freedom of thought, expression, religion, and conscience as well as the child's unique and privileged place in the African society. The ACRWC or Charter, is a regional policy that was adopted in 1990 and is the most comprehensive regional instrument on children's rights created in response to the UNCRC to represent an African concept of children's rights. The ACRWC is designed to reflect virtues of the African cultural heritage, their historical background and the values of the African civilization (Couzens & Zaal, 2009:299-320).

The Charter recognises that the situation of most African children remains critical owing to their socio-economic, traditional, and developmental circumstances. Seepamore (2016:571-584) further points out that complex socio-economic conditions in the Global South affect children the most as they are defenceless and vulnerable. Being in line with the UNCRC, the charter contains several sections that address the rights of children to care and protection and will be discussed next.

### **2.3.1 Government obligation to protecting rights and promoting welfare of children**

State parties are obligated by the ACWRC (1990:5) to take reasonable action towards ensuring the care and protection of children. Moreover, the ACWRC (1990:8) further obligates state parties to protect children's rights and promote their welfare through assisting parents or guardians with material needs and support programs that can promote access to resources such as housing, health, food, and clothing. Yet, even though state parties have a role to play, parents and guardians are still the key role players in the care and protection of children (Louw & Louw, 2014: 143-145). It is exactly these key role players that are absent in child-headed households who must try to manage without them (Van Dijk & Van Driel, 2009: 915-927). Moreover, the vulnerability of child-headed households are increased because the family

environment that should serve as a safety net, is eroded thereby causing children to be exposed to all types of challenges. These are paramount issues that could determine the wellbeing of children (Maqoko & Dreyer, 2008: 717-731).

The protection of children's rights and promotion of their welfare is determined by different sections in the Charter. Section 4 of the ACRWC (1990:3) states that in "all actions concerning children undertaken by any person or authority, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration". Section 3 (ACRWC, 1990:3) highlights that state parties need to "take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination". Moreover, state parties are required to "assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child" (ACRWC, 1990:3).

Thus, this regional policy is in line with the UNCRC which states that children need special care and protection because of their vulnerability and that the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration in all matters affecting the child. The ACRWC also addresses the rights of children to care and protection in line with the UNCRC, which recognises children's rights to care and protection and places special emphasis on the primary caring and protective responsibility of the family. It is the same with regards to active participation, where the ACRWC in relation to the UNCRC recognises that the child has the right to express their views freely in all matters that affect them.

### **2.3.2 Separation from parents**

The ACRWC stipulates that state parties to the Charter shall ensure that a child who is parentless, or who is temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment, or who in his or her best interests cannot be brought up or allowed to remain in that environment, shall be provided with alternative family care, which could include, foster placement, or placement in suitable institutions for the care of children. Section 25(1) of the ACRWC (1990) further points out that any child who is permanently or temporarily deprived of his family environment for any reason shall be entitled to special protection and assistance. In addition, section 25(3) states that when considering alternative family care for the child, their best interests must be thoroughly considered. Both the UNCRC as well as the ACRWC advocates for the

care and protection of children separated from their parents. Section 19(2) mentions that every child who is separated from one or both parents shall have the right to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis.

However, in a child-headed household, children often do not have direct contact with any parent on a regular basis. Furthermore, in an effort to look after themselves and their siblings the heads of child-headed households are often forced to drop out of school and to find work and so become vulnerable to many forms of abuse (Maqoko & Dreyer, 2008:717-731). Moreover, the children living in child-headed households are vulnerable and exposed to a variety of psycho-social problems that develop because there is no adult caregiver and no one to give parental guidance and where the burden of care rests upon another child (Mturi, 2012:506-516). It is clear from the above that child-headed households are separated from their parents, often with no alternative care option that would give them the advantage of substitute parents.

### **2.3.3 Parental responsibilities, care, and protection**

It is stipulated that parents need to secure, within their abilities and financial capacities, conditions of living necessary to the child's development and to ensure that domestic discipline is administered with humanity and in a manner consistent with the inherent dignity of the child (ACRWC, 1990:9). In addition, parents and families of children have the primary responsibility to realise children's care, including their socio-economic rights (Lim, 2009:53-55). Section 20(1) of the ACRWC (1990:9) points out that parents or other persons responsible for the child shall have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child and shall have the duty to ensure that the best interests of the child are always their basic concern.

Section 19(1) of the ACRWC (1990:9) mentions that "every child shall be entitled to the enjoyment of parental care and protection and shall, whenever possible, have the right to reside with his or her parents". Furthermore, it states that no child shall be separated from its parents against the child's will, except when a judicial authority determines in accordance with the appropriate law, that such separation is in the best interests of the child. Moreover, section 16(2) requires that measures be taken for the establishment of special monitoring units to provide the necessary support for the child and for those who care for the child (ACRWC, 1990:8). While the ACRWC (1990:9)

stipulates that every child is entitled to the enjoyment of parental care and protection, it would be according to South African authors difficult to apply this stipulation to child-headed households where children live by themselves or with siblings (Alpaslan & Nziyane, 2011:117-136). These children have to live without their parents, as well as the financial capacity of the parent.

#### **2.3.4 Protection of the family**

Families must enjoy the protection and support of the State for its establishment and development. Section 18(1) ACRWC (1990:10) mentions that the family shall be the natural unit and basis of society. However, with the South African families that are often exposed to high levels of intimate partner violence and child abuse, keeping the family together and ensuring the protection of children is not always guaranteed (Phillips, 2011:267). Many South African families also find themselves at a crossroads where family relations are challenged by a variety of social issues (Richter & Barbarin, 2001:17). Yet, it is important to understand that the protection of the family is in most cases crucial as families can then provide for the protection of children. The ACRWC in section 16(1) specifically requires that governments take specific legislative, administrative, social, and educational measures to protect children from all forms of torture, abuse, and degrading treatment amongst other problems (ACRWC, 1990).

Children in child-headed households have lost the care and support of their parents. They find themselves in a predicament because when parents die or migrate, they are left alone with limited options. They live without proper guidance, discipline, and control, which could adversely affect them as adults (Blaauw et al., 2011:138-152). Thus, governments should prioritise the protection and care of children of child-headed households as they have lost the right to care and to be protected from their parents. Furthermore child-headed households should be supported to ensure that they have the same opportunities as other children who are living with parents.

### **2.4 SOUTH AFRICAN POLICY AND LEGISLATION FOR THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN**

It is stated that the South African Constitution and much of the legislation addressing children's needs are regarded as world class, providing expressive, explicit, and more than satisfactory guarantees for the rights of children. To address children's needs,



the government is obligated to protect and promote the survival, development and wellbeing of children in order to attain a good quality of life (Abrahams & Matthews, 2011:22-30). This is because children's rights in South Africa occupy an important place in the domestic legal system (Lim, 2009:169-190).

However, children in the country, especially those in child-headed households are exposed to an unfortunate reality where their basic rights are either infringed or have not yet been realised (Martin, Hall & Lake, 2018:113-121). According to Abrahams and Matthews (2011:28-30) even though children are resilient in times of adversity, their vulnerability within families and society should not be underestimated. The authors further argue that the rights of children have remained on the global agenda at various forums since the advent of democracy and that the discourse on child rights has focused on the fulfilment of such imperatives. What follows is a discussion of the national laws reflecting the spirit of all the relevant international instruments and that have been ratified by South Africa.

#### **2.4.1 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa**

According to Lim (2009:194-201) the South African Constitution provides a national blueprint of a society that respects the equality and dignity of every person, children and adults alike. It further safeguards social, economic, and cultural rights, as well as the civil rights and freedoms of adults and children. Martin et al. (2018:115) highlight that South African children have a special place in the Constitution as their rights are provided extensive protection, with section 28 specifically devoted to children's rights. Literature confirms that section 28 of the Bill of Rights protects a wide range of rights incorporating both civil and political rights such as the right to government services and the right to political participation, respectively. It further points out that the realisation of section 28 is not subject to the availability of resources compared to other socio-economic rights protected in the Constitution, meaning that the child's best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child and that their rights should be protected at all times (Lim, 2009:198-201).

Section 28(1)(b) clearly states that every child has the right to family care or parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment, and that every child has the right to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse,



or degradation (Republic of South Africa, 1996:13-17). It is important to realise that in child-headed households, children are not removed and placed in alternative care, instead they take up social roles that are usually reserved for adults as they live without parental care (Muyomi, 2012:193). Therefore, to make up for the lack of parental care, the importance of social work services for these children cannot be ignored and should be effectively rendered as they require sufficient support services.

Lim (2009:194-201) adds that section 28(1)(b) protects children's right to parental care and family care and that it is only when such care is lacking, that the state is required to provide alternative care. In the case of child-headed households, the state makes the decision to not place children in alternative care, albeit without the support that foster children receive, leaving child-headed households vulnerable as they have no adults or parents, they have very limited means of generating an income, and they are unable to effectively sustain their households (Donald & Clacherty, 2005:24). Therefore, it is safe to say that the measures the South African Government had put in place to ensure that the rights of children in child-headed households are not infringed upon, should be re-examined, as it seems as if no extensive protection are afforded to children of child-headed households in the Constitution. In section 28 of the Constitution child-headed households are not even addressed.

#### **2.4.2 Children's Act 38 of 2005**

The Children's Act 38 of 2005 is a legal document created to help protect children and make sure that their rights are respected and protected (Republic of South Africa, 2005:60-67). The Children's Act is there to shield children and ensure that they are taken care of, no matter who they are, where they live, and who takes care of them. It is meant to keep families together and make sure that children are cared for by their family members or parents and placed in alternative care when there is no family (Republic of South Africa, 2005:60-67). This legislation highlights the importance of protecting children from abuse, harm, and neglect and was created in response to section 28 of the Bill of Rights (Republic of South Africa, 1996:13-16).

Section 7 of the Children's Act elaborates that when the government has to decide or do something that involves children, it has to consider the child's best interests, be it the nature of the personal relationship between the child and any other caregiver, the

likely effect on the child of any change in the child's circumstances such as separation from either one or both parents, and the need for a child to be brought up within a stable family environment and where it is not possible, in an environment resembling as closely as possible a caring family environment (Republic of South Africa, 1996:20-21). In line with section 3(1) of the UNCRC (1989) as well as the ACRWC (1990), section 7 of the Children's Act adds that with regards to alternative family care for children who do not live with their parents or caregivers, their best interests are of paramount importance and any decision made should serve to satisfy their interests.

Section 150(1) of the Children's Act provides nine grounds on which children are found in need of care and protection, including that children can be found in need of care and protection if they are abandoned or orphaned and are without any visible support, if they are at risk of maltreatment, abuse and neglect, and if their parents or care givers lack the ability to provide appropriate support and care (Republic of South Africa, 2005:63-64). It is important to note that in terms of section 150(2), it may be found that children in child-headed households are in need of care and protection. This is because living in child-headed households itself does not qualify as an automatic ground for finding that a child is in need of care and protection. However, section 150(2) states that the child-headed household must be referred to a designated social worker who must investigate the child-headed household to establish if the children in the household are in need of care and protection as indicated in section 150(1), before a child would be removed from the household. If, after the investigation, the children are found not to be in need of care and protection as stipulated in section 150(1) the social worker should provide, where necessary appropriate support and services without having to remove the child from the existing placement of care (Republic of South Africa, 2005:63-64).

#### **2.4.3 Children's Amendment Act 2007**

More recently another act was promulgated. The Children's Amendment Act 41 of 2007 directly and explicitly impacts the lives of children. The Children's Amendment Act amended the Children's Act of 2005. The amendment process commenced with the South African Law Reform Commission's recommendation that child-headed households should be recognised and given legal recognition as a placement option

for orphaned children in need of care (Lim, 2009:223-231). It is important to remember that for years child-headed households have been considered as a form of alternative care in sub-Saharan Africa, because families and communities were able to respond in accordance with the African indigenous family system principle of taking orphaned or neglected children into their extended families for care and support (Phillips, 2011:43).

However, the Children's Amendment Act clearly states the requirements to be recognised as a child-headed household. The provincial head of the Department of Social Development may recognise a household as a child-headed household if the parent, guardian, or care-giver of the household is terminally ill, has died, or has abandoned the children in the household, if no adult family member is available to provide care for the children in the household, and when a child over the age of 16 years has assumed the role of a care-giver in respect of the children in the household (Republic of South Africa, 2007:25).

The Children's Amendment Act further confirms that a child-headed household must function under the general supervision of an adult designated by a children's court, or an organ of state, or a non-governmental organisation determined by the provincial head of social development. This person must be a fit and proper person to be allowed to supervise a child-headed household. The Children's Amendment Act determines that an appointed supervisor can only make decisions concerning the household after consulting the child heading the household and other children, given their age, maturity, and stage of development. The act also regulates that the child heading the household may take all day-to-day decisions relating to the household and may report the supervising adult to the organ of state or non-governmental organisation, if the child or children are not satisfied with the manner in which the supervising adult performs his or her duties which includes amongst others, collecting and administering any social security grants and assisting the members of the household with legal documentation when required (Kruger, 2014:126-142). The Children's Amendment Act is clear that child-headed households should have adult assistance to fulfil the parental role as indicated in section 28 of the Constitution. This means that a social worker as indicated in section 150(2) of the Children's Act (Republic of South Africa, 2005), must investigate the need for care and protection of the children in the child-

headed household. If the social worker decided that the children would not be removed, that social worker must identify what adult assistance would be required. However, according to Muyomi (2012:193-207) the question of how section 28 of the South African Constitution is being implemented in practice, remains to be answered as children in child-headed households are widely reported to be living without parental care.

In terms of the Social Assistance Act 13 of 2004, the child heading the household or the appointed supervisor, may collect and administer any social security grant or other grants for the child-headed household, or other assistance to which the household is entitled (Republic of South Africa, 2007:25). In addition, the Children's Amendment Act highlights that a child-headed household may not be excluded from any grant, subsidy, aid, relief, or other assistance or programmes provided by an organ of state in the national, provincial, or local sphere of government just because the household is headed by a child. Although several grants are provided for children it is not very clear if these grants benefit the wellbeing of vulnerable children in child-headed households, because with no adult caregivers in these households it becomes extremely difficult to access specific social grants, causing child-headed households to become financially very vulnerable (Blaauw et al., 2011:138-152).

#### **2.4.4 White Paper for Social Welfare 1997**

The White Paper for Social Welfare is the first social welfare policy that was developed and based on the South African Constitution (Ministry for Welfare & Population Development, 1997:3-10). The policy document states that family is the basic unit of society and adds that family life will be strengthened and promoted through family-oriented policies. According to the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) the wellbeing of children depends on the ability of families to function effectively, and because children are vulnerable, they need to grow up in a nurturing and secure family that can ensure their survival, development, protection, and participation in family and social life. Although there is a strong emphasis on the importance of the family, Makiwane, Berry (2013:1-8) and Hall (2018:10) highlight that the majority of South African children grow up in families where the fathers either do not live in their homes or are absent from their lives as a result of historical and current social factors, thus perpetuating the

impossibility of growing up in an intact family. This fact also means that the majority of children grow up in single-parent families where the mother is the head of the household. These households are generally disadvantaged in terms of access to important socio-economic resources such as land, livestock, credit, education, healthcare, and extension services. Their dependency and vulnerability combined with sexist societal attitudes ensure that such households are typically poorer than their male counterparts (Ellis & Adams, 2009:14). It is safe to conclude that single-parent families, especially those where the mother is the head of the household, are not necessarily secure families and that these households could easily expose children to vulnerability.

The White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) identifies children in difficult circumstances as children who are denied their most basic human rights and whose growth and development are consequently impaired. These could be pre-school children, children who are in out-of-home care, children with disabilities, children suffering from chronic disease, street children, children exposed to child labour or substance abuse or a lack of nutrition, and children with divorcing parents. However, in 1997 the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) did not identify children of child-headed households as vulnerable or as children in difficult circumstances.

In 2016 Geldenhuys (2016:25-29) identified children of child-headed households as living in extremely vulnerable circumstances and in need of protection and support, however the 2016 comprehensive report on the review of the White Paper for social welfare (1997) again, did not include those who live in child-headed households as vulnerable. This is a serious omission because children in child-headed households are vulnerable to multiple socio-economic challenges and should be considered to be in difficult circumstances (Geldenhuys, 2016:25-28).

#### **2.4.5 White Paper on Families in South Africa 2013**

The White Paper on Families is a South African policy that sets out the necessary guidelines for the promotion of family life. The objective of this policy is to strengthen the family as a system by promoting healthy household environments to enable the family's positive development (Department of Social Development, 2012:11-12). The White Paper on Families (2013) views the family as a key development imperative and

seeks to mainstream family issues into government-wide, policy-making initiatives in order to foster positive family wellbeing and overall socio-economic development in the country (Republic of South Africa, 2013:11).

Hall (2018:2) established that South Africa is regarded as one of the few countries in the Global South that has adopted a family policy, however due to a variety of social issues that impact families negatively, with two of the highlighted issues being the HIV/Aids epidemic and domestic violence, it is difficult to recognise the impact of the policy. Knijn and Patel (2018:6-12) further emphasise that there are deep structural causes and systematic barriers that obstruct family wellbeing in South Africa leaving children in extremely difficult circumstances and rendering them helpless by virtue of being children.

The White Paper on Families highlights child-headed households amongst other types of families and elaborates that those households are at risk of having to cope with various challenges. These challenges are that they have to live without adults, in poorer living conditions, with a lack of regular income from earnings and social grants, with having to live in informal dwellings, and with being disproportionately located in non-urban areas where service delivery is poor (Meintjes, Hall, Marera & Boule, 2009:21). It is clear to see that the White Paper for Families has failed children from child-headed households because it has not strengthened their families and not promoted healthy household environments to enable their positive development.

## **2.5 CHILDCARE AND PROTECTION IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Section 28 of the South African Constitution, section 1 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005, the Amendment Bill 41 of 2007, and the White Paper on Families of South Africa 2013 are just some of the governmental policies that South Africa uses to guide child care and protection (Hope & Van Wyk, 2018:421-433). Internationally there are also a host of treaties including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) to which South Africa is part of. Makiwane and Berry (2013:322) point out that the key objective of these policies, acts, and treaties, is the protection of children and that their security and welfare is a major priority. Moreover, safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of children, as well as protecting children from neglect, exploitation, and

physical, emotional or moral harm, is important to the realisation of childcare and protection in South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 1996:13-14).

In line with international and regional policies, childcare, and protection in South Africa necessitates the promotion of respect, protection, and securing the fulfilment of, and guarding against any infringement, of child rights (Republic of South Africa, 1996:12-17). Childcare further speaks to the importance of providing conducive living conditions for children as well as the maintenance of sound relationships and accommodation of any special needs. In addition, the concepts of care and protection requires that children in need of care be thoroughly assisted with their best interests being made a priority (Republic of South Africa, 1996:15-17). The following concepts provide a brief description of what children in need of care and protection and their best interests, constitutes.

### **2.5.1 A child in need of care and protection**

A child is in need of care and protection if the child has been abandoned or orphaned and is without any visible means of support, has been exploited, or lives in circumstances that expose the child to exploitation, displays behaviour which cannot be controlled by the caregiver, lives or works on the streets or begs for a living, has been abandoned or orphaned, and is without any visible means of support and is exposed to circumstances which may seriously harm the child's physical, mental, or social wellbeing (Republic of South Africa, 2005:64). South African children are exposed to a number of difficulties and challenges such as abuse, neglect, poverty, exploitation, and other traumatic experiences. These experiences make them more vulnerable and in order to satisfy their needs they require sufficient care to alleviate and ultimately eradicate their challenges (Nonyana-Mokabane, 2012:5-22). Concerning child-headed households the Children's Act 38 of 2005 determines that children in child-headed households (amongst others) may be in need of care and protection and must be investigated by a designated social worker who must take the necessary measures to assist the child, even when it was found that the child is not in need of care and protection (Republic of South Africa, 2005:64).



### **2.5.2 Best interests of the child**

According to the Department of Social Development (2012:5-25) the best interests of the child is the first thought to consider and think about when making decisions that will affect the child. This is in line with section 3(1) of the UNCRC (1989) which states that the best interests of the child is a primary consideration. This is also confirmed in section 4 of the ACRWC that determines that all actions concerning children and undertaken by any person or authority, must be in their best interests and should be considered first (ACRWC, 1990:3). It is further articulated that when children's best interests are ignored, they tend to end up in situations that are bad or not favourable to their growth and wellbeing (Department of Social Development, 2012:24).

Section 7 of the Children's Act stresses that for the best interests of the child to be a reality, it is crucial to look at the attitude that the parent has towards the child and the attitude that the parent has about his or her duties as a parent. Furthermore, the Children's Act requires parents or caregivers to always think about what is best for the child, emphasising the child's personal relationships, and emotional and intellectual needs. Section 7 also states that any major changes in the child's life could potentially affect the child and that the best interest of the child must always be a priority (Republic of South Africa, 2005:64). It is this section that social workers will utilise and apply in their decision-making process when they have to establish if the best interest of the child was taken into consideration and whether it is necessary to remove the child or not according to section 150.

## **2.6 CIRCUMSTANCES PERTAINING TO CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS**

Child-headed households are exposed to a variety of difficult circumstances because of different reasons (Songca, 2011:340-359). According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) (2008:21) the magnitude of child-headed households is significant, complex, and multi-faceted, disrupting family and community functioning and negatively affecting the rearing and development of children. Geldenhuys (2016:28) points out the difficulty of living without parents and adds that children interviewed by Nyaradzo (2013:47-53) indicated that living without parents is difficult as they had no one to guide, supervise, or encourage them leaving them feeling lonely and stressed. Children as young as eight years of age succumb to



various forms of exploitative labour or even prostitution to make ends meet (Nyaradzo, 2013:47-53). Some of the children heading child-headed households do not go to school as they end up begging on the streets or working part-time jobs to be able to feed their young siblings (Pillay & Nesengani, 2006:131-147).

Children in child-headed households experience myriad adversities as they have to go through life without the presence and guidance of parents or guardians (Nziyane & Alpaslan, 2012:290-305). German (2005:364) adds that younger children in the household tend to be responsible for domestic chores, such as, cooking, doing laundry, and cleaning, while the head-child is involved with income generating activities. Within situations like these children become more vulnerable. An example would be of girls, with some of them younger than sixteen, who would exchange sexual favours for money or employment and who may, in the process, fall pregnant. Phillips (2011:138-149) adds that children of child-headed households are vulnerable to all types of abuse because the family environment that should serve as a security net is non-existent. According to Geldenhuys (2016:25-28) these children often do not have sufficient funds to pay for their or the schooling or their siblings, resulting in them getting a poor or sometimes, no education.

Mogotlane, Chauke, Van Rensburg, Human and Kganakga (2010:24-30) highlight other risks associated with child-headed households and elaborate that children tend to be exposed to unemployment later in life due to poor education, lack of skills, disease, prostitution, crime, pregnancy, poor or no shelter, and lack of knowledge about their rights. Furthermore, Bequele (2007:33) explains how children in child-headed households are affected by emotional trauma as a result of their circumstances and possible psychological challenges that they cannot afford to attend to. In addition, Geldenhuys (2016:25-28) argues that child-headed household children have numerous problems as they further have to cope with multiple forms of loss due to sibling dispersal, relocation, and the reconstruction of their family following the death or migration of their parents.

South Africa is a signatory to various international and regional treaties and conventions committing to the protection and care of all children in the country. South Africa also has a range of constitutional provisions towards children living in child-

headed households, such as section 28(1)(b) of the Constitution which recognises that every child has a right to family or parental care or an appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment (Republic of South Africa, 1996). These provisions bring into question the appropriateness of child-headed households with regard to their impact on children's development and their access to this particular right (Sloth-Nielsen, 2009:117). Furthermore, child-headed households could be viewed as a violation of the children's right to alternative care, especially regarding the right to survival, protection, development and participation as indicated by the UNCRC. In the case of child-headed households, there is a possibility that the rights of children who reside in these households are violated against, therefore the rights based perspective is applicable as it reflects the recognition of human rights as essential for people to live in freedom and dignity.

## **2.7 RIGHTS BASED PERSPECTIVE TO CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS**

The study moves from the point that children's rights are compromised in child-headed households and therefore utilises the rights-based perspective as a core theoretical underpinning. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, commonly known as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights or the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) (2006:15) defines a rights-based perspective as a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. The rights-based perspective mainly aims at advancing the realisation of human rights as laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other major human rights instruments (UNICEF, 2011:22-24).

Nyamu-Musembi and Cornwall (2004:222-231) highlight that the rights-based perspective is based upon the values, standards and principles reflected in the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and successively legally binding human rights conventions and treaties. The rights-based perspective is seen as both a process and approach underscoring steps and strategies that must be undertaken to ensure that the rights of vulnerable individuals and groups are respected, promoted, protected, and fulfilled (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2002:252-301).

The rights-based perspective facilitates the translation of needs into rights and acknowledges the human person as an active subject of rights and as a claimholder. It further identifies the duties and obligations of those against whom a claim can be brought to ensure that rights and entitlements are realised. The rights-based perspective further defines the relationship between the right holder and duty bearer and outlines mechanisms by which duty bearers can be held accountable (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2004:114-120). In the context of the rights-based perspective, rights holders are identified as those who are entitled to claim rights, they may include vulnerable groups such as women, children, elderly people, and persons with disabilities. The primary duty bearer is said to be the state and non-state actors as well as service providers (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2004:114-119).

### **2.7.1 Principles of the rights-based perspective**

The principles of the rights-based perspective include universality and inalienability, indivisibility, inter-dependence and inter-relatedness, equality and non-discrimination, participation and inclusion, empowerment and accountability, and rule of law. These principles help identify individuals and groups that are marginalised or excluded, or that are at risk of marginalisation or exclusion, and guides implementation of remedial strategies. According to United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (1998:220) the value of the rights-based perspective lies in the transformative potential of human rights to highlight and alleviate injustice, inequality, and poverty, as well as other forms of vulnerabilities. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2004:114-119) elaborates that rights-based perspective strategies to transformation should generally be understood as a set of program activities based on international human rights with a goal to promote and protect human rights. Furthermore, it has been established that attainment of welfare goals cannot be separated from fulfilment of human rights. The principles of the rights-based perspective are in line with the South African Constitution which is regarded as unmatched when compared to the constitutions of other countries, because it is rights-based and in line with the UNCRC and ACRWC and is founded on the values of human dignity, the achievement of equality, and the advancement of human rights and freedoms. The principles of the rights-based perspective will be now be described.

### **2.7.1.1 Universality and inalienability**

The first principle of the human rights-based perspective is that of universality and inalienability and it explains that all human beings are born free and have equal dignity and rights simply by virtue of their humanity (OHCHR, 2004:114-120). All people everywhere in the world are entitled to human rights and these entitlements cannot be taken away or be given up voluntarily. The fact that section 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is in line with the rights-based perspective points out that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights (UNICEF, 2010:10). This means that all children have rights regardless of their ethnicity, gender, religion, language, abilities, or any other status and it is maintained that all their rights must be protected and promoted equally. Moreover, all children's rights must be satisfied, and priority should be given to the most disadvantaged as they tend to need immediate attention and support for their rights to be realised. When it comes to children of child-headed households it is as important for their rights to be fulfilled, equally protected, and promoted as they are exposed to difficult circumstances.

### **2.7.1.2 Indivisibility**

The principle speaks to the fact that all the rights whether, civil, cultural, economic, political, or social are all inherent to the dignity of every person, meaning that they are inseparable (OHCHR, 2002:213). Furthermore, all rights are equally important and essential for the realisation of a life of respect and dignity and UNICEF (2010:10-13) state that these rights have equal status and cannot be ranked in a hierarchy. With regards to children, this indicates that all their rights should be satisfied through responding to their different needs, including psychosocial and developmental needs amongst others. To illustrate, section 9(1) of the UNCRC points out that state parties shall ensure that a child is not separated from his or her parents against their will, while section 18(1) mentions that states parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child (Children's Alliance, 2010:5-44). This provides a clear connection between the provisions in different sections of the UNCRC and highlights the importance of the equal recognition of children, because a lack of uniformity and unequal recognition could potentially affect policy implementation and

result in a high number of disadvantaged children because of unfulfilled rights. As it is the case with section 28(1)(b) which protects some children's right to parental care and family care and provides alternative care when such care is lacking, but the same does not apply to child-headed households, as the state makes the decision to not place children in alternative care despite their challenges and without the support that foster children receive, leaving child-headed households vulnerable. Child-headed households should at least receive the same support as children in foster care.

### **2.7.1.3 Inter-dependence and inter-relatedness**

The principle of interdependence or interrelatedness acknowledges that rights are intricately connected, and that the non-attainment of one may affect the realisation of the other (UNICEF, 2004:115-117). It can be understood that the relation of children's rights to family or parental care or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment may depend on the right to basic nutrition, shelter, basic healthcare services, and social services (Republic of South Africa, 1996). According to Human and Van Rensburg (2011:959-966) children's rights are compromised in child-headed households. Therefore, the provision of services to uplift, protect, and ensure their optimal functioning should be executed in a comprehensive manner whereby all their rights are protected and promoted. Their right to shelter should not be overlooked because their right to social services is satisfied, all their rights should be responded to adequately because they are inter-dependent.

### **2.7.1.4 Equality and non-discrimination**

The principle of equality and non-discrimination explains that all individuals are equal as human beings, and that by virtue of the inherent dignity of each person, they are entitled to their rights without discrimination of any kind (Ndonga, 2016:21). A rights-based perspective requires people to focus on addressing discrimination and inequality, hence the principle necessitates access to available services for everyone in order to have their basic needs fulfilled (UNICEF, 2004:118). Within the rights-based perspective, the principle of equality and non-discrimination denotes that programme effort should target excluded groups who, for instance, have limited access to social services. Furthermore, UNICEF (2004:118) explicates that a rights-based assessment

may help identify prevailing discriminatory patterns, social stigmas, and other forms of inequality experienced by marginalised groups.

In line with the rights-based perspective, section 2 of the UNCRC expects the state to respect and ensure the rights of each child without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, nationality, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status. Muyomi (2012:193-207) identifies multiple ways in which children can experience discrimination, including malnutrition, inadequate care and attention, restricted opportunities for play, learning and education, or the inhibition of free expression of feelings and views, and neglect or abandonment.

In the case of child-headed households, they experience hardships and “accepted neglect” as they live without caregivers and as a result assume responsibility that is suited for adults. Overall, it is possible to see that life treats them differently as a result of their circumstances. The South African Constitution states that children have the right to parental or alternative care in case they are removed (Republic of South Africa, 1996). The Children’s Amendment Act states that a fit and proper adult should be assigned to the household to act as a parent (Republic of South Africa, 2007). If this aspect is not implemented, then the child heading the household must provide care for themselves and subsequently operate as parents to their siblings (Muyomi, 2012:193-207). These conditions suggest that child-headed households are deprived of parental care and protection as well as restricted opportunities for play compared to other children who reside with their parents. Therefore, it is probable to conclude that children of child-headed households, who find themselves in circumstances not of their own making, are exposed to inequality and discrimination.

#### **2.7.1.5 Participation and inclusion**

The principle of participation is recognised as a right, guaranteed by international law and is thus imperative in the rights framework. This principle sees children as individuals who are subjects of their own rights and active participants in their own development (UNICEF, 2005:115). Participation rests upon the view that every person and all people are entitled to active, free, and meaningful participation in contribution

to, and enjoyment of, civil, economic, social, cultural, and political development, through which human rights and fundamental freedoms can be enjoyed (UNICEF, 2005:115). The principle of participation also implies that all children are entitled to participate in society to the maximum of their potential with the family, community, and the state taking steps to provide an enabling environment for children to thrive in (UNICEF, 2005:116). Within the rights-based perspective, this principle highlights the importance of involving children in matters that affect them and ensuring that their participation is encouraged and supported. In the case of child-headed households, it is important to give these households a voice to articulate their needs so that necessary assistance can be provided to alleviate their challenges and satisfy their needs. This is also recognised by the Children's Amendment Act which stipulates that the appointed supervisor is expected to not take any decisions concerning the household without consulting the child heading the household and other children given their age, maturity and stage of development. Moreover, the child heading the household may take all day-to-day decisions relating to the household (Kruger, 2014:126-142).

#### **2.7.1.6 Empowerment**

The principle of empowerment means that individuals and communities should know their rights. It also means that they should be fully supported to participate in the development of policy and practices which affect their lives and to claim rights where necessary (UNICEF, 2004:120). The importance of building people's capacities to utilise their strength and hold those in authority accountable is stressed by UNICEF (2005:115-117). Furthermore, the utilisation of this principle is rooted in giving people the power to change their own lives and communities and to lead a positive life.

The marginalised and most vulnerable in society should obtain immediate attention in order for them to realise their rights. UNICEF (2009b:4-9) maintains that children's rights should be protected and promoted as they are the most vulnerable and normally find themselves in difficult circumstances. In addition, Louw and Louw (2014:4) point out that in most ancient cultures the common perception was that children were the property of their parents who could therefore treat them in any manner they wanted, further exposing children to danger and vulnerability and disregarding their



empowerment. The International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD) (2007:3) sustains that children are subjects of human rights in terms of international law and not objects of pity. Furthermore, section 150(2) of the Children's Act states that necessary support and services should be provided to children in child-headed households by a designated social worker if they are not found to be in need of care and protection to promote their human rights and empower them.

#### **2.7.1.7 Accountability and rule of law**

The seventh principle is based on accountability and respect for the rule of law. This principle lies at the core of human rights principles and requires that human rights be protected by law, which is a fundamental purpose of a rights-based perspective. In addition, UNICEF (2005:119) elaborates that accountability directly relates to the rule of law and that it is derived from the fact that rights imply duties which in turn demand accountability. UNICEF (2005:119-120) further highlights that the principle demands that state and other duty-bearers that assist administrations in fulfilling their obligations should be responsible for and ensure that the human rights of children are not undermined, they should further ensure accountability according to the processes of the law when there is an infringement of children's rights. The Children's Act (Republic of South Africa, 2005) elaborates that when the government has to decide or do something that involves children, it has to consider the child 's best interests. Therefore, to adhere to the stipulations of section 28(1) of the South African Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996) child-headed households should be protected from maltreatment and neglect and granted their right to family care or parental care, or to an appropriate alternative.

### **2.8 CONCLUSION**

Child-headed households were first identified in sub-Saharan Africa in the late eighties. The "ground-breaking" development to legally recognise child-headed households as a form of a family is at odds with principles of children rights, especially with a conventional idea that children should be taken care of by an adult caregiver. In this Chapter 2 the relevant literature and research applicable to the aspects of child-headed households was reviewed with more emphasis on policy and legislation and the circumstances pertaining to child-headed households from a rights-based



perspective. It is important to understand that the rights of children in child-headed households to family and parental care are violated against as they go through life without their parents or adult caregivers. Furthermore, looking at the circumstances of child-headed households, it is clear that they are not a form of family but a social problem which require effective policy creation and implementation in order to ensure that the best interests of these children are met.

In the next chapter the needs and challenges of child-headed households as well as the required social work services, will be described.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE NEEDS AND CHALLENGES OF CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS AND THE SOCIAL SERVICES REQUIRED**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Worldwide there are millions of children who have lost one or both of their parents due to various circumstances. This has led to child-headed households becoming a common feature in society where the marginalised, weakest, and voiceless children often end up having to care for other children (Kotze, 2011:35-49). Literature indicates that the rights of children in child-headed households are heavily infringed. Kotze (2011:35-49) explains that children's rights to be free from abuse and exploitation has been compromised with the loss of a traditional family environment. According to Mturi (2012:506-516) this role reversal forced upon children has significantly left them with perpetuating needs and challenges. This study acknowledges that children in child-headed households, especially headers, are vulnerable and exposed to multiple challenges as they assume the role of a primary care giver to their siblings. It is important to note that no studies have been done on the challenges experienced by headers of child-headed households and that literature about the challenges experienced by the headers of these households is lacking.

To reach the second objective of the study, the purpose of this chapter is to describe the needs and challenges of headers of child-headed households and what possible social services they require. The chapter will commence with a discussion of the different needs of headers of child-headed households and the type of challenges they are exposed to. This will be followed by a brief discussion of the social work services that should be available to them. The rights of headers to social services will also be discussed in order to reflect how their rights are infringed upon as they are forced into adulthood. This will be followed by a discussion about the relevant challenges that could influence effective social service delivery as these challenges also contribute to the difficulties of child-headed households to access effective and efficient social services to sustain their livelihoods. The chapter ends with a discussion of the lack of integrated service delivery for children in child-headed households.

## **3.2 NEEDS OF CHILDREN IN CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS**

Children in child-headed households have the same needs as other children. They are vulnerable because they are children, however their vulnerability is extended by the fact that they do not have adult caregivers (Haile, Nigatu, Gashaw & Demelash, 2016:1-7). For young children to grow and develop they must be protected and nurtured to meet their nutritional need and to safeguard their health. These children also need to have affectionate relationships with stable caregivers in order to develop psychological and social capacities. Furthermore, they need to have ongoing interactions with encouraging adults to promote their language and cognitive development (Roelen, Delap, Jones & Chettri, 2017:309-318).

The psychological, social, and material needs of young children are best met by a constant group of dedicated people that are related to one another and that operate in lifelong family-type groups (Pillay, 2016:1-8). To achieve a positive developmental path, it must also be understood that children do not exist in isolation of their families and communities (Schmid & Patel, 2016:246-255). Children also have fundamental needs that should be fulfilled, however, contextual or structural barriers to resources are significant risk factors that could compromise the fulfilling of these needs and could influence their wellbeing. It is these barriers that usually cause disadvantaged children to be affected severely (Laryea-Adjei & Sadan, 2012:75-77; Hall & Woolard, 2012:32-37). Children in child-headed households have many needs and may be vulnerable in many ways. Needs such as a need for food, for shelter, and for education have been identified in the past (Hall, Richter, Mokomane & Lake, 2018:36). In the next section the specific needs of child-headed households, including psychological, social, and material needs will be discussed.

### **3.2.1 Psychological needs – belonging, love, and warmth**

Psychological needs of a child can be understood as the need to be happy, to be creative, to belong to social groups, and to have hope for the future. Literature points out that younger children have specific needs for love and affection or warmth and that children who receive affection, stimulation, and support in early childhood, have a good foundation for growth and development, coping with challenges, overcoming disadvantages, and making positive contributions to society (Van Rensburg, Human

& Moleki , 2013:56-69). The fact that children need unconditional love is supported in a report of UNICEF (2002:43) which state that parents and caregivers are responsible for providing unconditional love to their offspring. Love, stability, and warmth are characteristics of a happy family and plays an important role in child development (Louw & Louw, 2014:205).

However, in a child-headed household, the substitute caregiver is a child who was left alone and who must balance their developmental needs with those of their younger siblings whom they are taking care of. These caregivers have a limited number of options in caring for their younger siblings, and they have, in many instances, no capacity to cope with the situation (Mturi, 2012:506-516). Moreover, children in child-headed households rarely receive the love and affection they require for their sustainable growth because they do not have parents or adult caregivers who can respond to their psychological needs (Pillay, 2016:1-8).

### **3.2.2 Social needs – interpersonal interactions**

Social needs refer to the need of a child for interpersonal interactions that occur in caring relationships in everyday life, at home, at school, and in a community. This includes positive relational exchanges, as well as love and protection that children experience in family environments. Families are seen as resource and support structures that are defined by interactions and exchanges between siblings and parents or guardians (Summers, 2016:99). These structures play a significant role in the development of children as they often satisfy the social needs of a child. That is why it is so important for children, especially vulnerable children, to be cared for in a family environment. Stable family environments have advantages such as the establishment of lifelong social connections that play a significant role in the development of children. This is because children's relationships with other people are largely determined by who they interact with in their society, be it their parents, guardians, or family members. The children of child-headed households who end up living by themselves or with siblings, are exposed to a variety of extremely vulnerable circumstances, such as the risk of sexual abuse and malnutrition (Alpaslan & Nziyane, 2011:117-136). Muyomi (2012:193-207) points out that the wellbeing of children is compromised if their parents are not involved in their lives as they are often denied their sense of childhood and are socially burdened because they are forced to handle

responsibilities, such as living alone and providing care for their siblings, that are not appropriate for their developmental age. Furthermore child-headed households are socially disempowered because they lack adequate social support from their families and communities and as a result find themselves in vulnerable conditions that affect their development (Van Dijk & Van Driel, 2012:283-293). In the case of the header of the child-headed household, the need for love and protection remains unfulfilled and in turn the circumstances they are exposed to require them to provide the love and protection they also need to their siblings.

### **3.2.3 Material needs – food, clothes, and school**

Material needs are the needs of the child for food, clothes, school, health services and housing. It is important for material needs of children to be satisfied, for example, adequate nutrition is cardinal to the optimal physical and psychological growth of a child, and a lack of nutrition could result in severe impairment (Louw & Louw, 2014:155). Child-headed households experience greater income poverty which in turn perpetuates their material needs as they go through life. This often culminates in the household being exposed to food insecurity, a lack of adequate clothing, and poor living conditions (Mogotlane, Chauke, Van Rensburg, Human & Kganakga, 2010:24-32). Maqoko and Dreyer (2008:717-731) point out that children in child-headed households often go for days without food and Phillips (2011:140) adds that these children usually live in inadequate dwellings and in extreme poverty, with close to half of these families surviving without any financial support.

Attending school gives children the opportunity to acquire crucial skills (Sapungan & Sapungan, 2014:42-47), however children from child-headed households are most likely to be absent, or even drop out from school as many of them will need time to run households and take care of younger siblings. This caretaking then interrupts with their education as these children often end up having to beg for money or doing part-time jobs just to be able to feed their young siblings (Pillay, 2012:4). There is a significant lack of awareness regarding the educational needs of child-headed households. The most vulnerable of child-headed households are those residing in rural areas, as very few of them attain matric (Ibebuikwe, Van Belkum & Maja, 2014:61-81).

It is crucial to notice that the material needs of headers of child-headed households are not adequately satisfied. This clearly illustrates how their rights are infringed upon and how they are exposed to a magnitude of challenges that make their conditions very vulnerable. The specific challenges that headers of child-headed households experience will be discussed in the next section.

### **3.3 CHALLENGES CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS EXPERIENCE**

Child-headed households are exposed to many challenges. These challenges range from having to live in poverty, not having access to social grants, finding it difficult to complete school, having to assume adult roles, and being exploited economically and sexually. These challenges are consequently discussed.

#### **3.3.1 Living in poverty**

Children in child-headed households tend to be extremely poor, live in inadequate dwellings, and have little access to income (Hall et al., 2018:36). This exposure to poverty is the root cause for poor child development and wellbeing (Donald, Wedderbur, Barnett, Nhapi, Rehman & Stadler, 2019:35). Poverty directly undermines the fulfilment of basic material needs, such as food, education, and healthcare. When it comes to food, Van Breda (2010:259-280) points out that children in child-headed households have a good understanding of the range of foods they had to eat, however, the food groups they had in the house were limited, and excluded meat or other protein, fruit, bread and soap and other toiletries. This lack of material needs, particularly the lack of food, affects a child's wellbeing and is also associated with biological and psychosocial risk factors, such as malnutrition (Walker, Wachs, Grantham-McGregor, Black, Nelson, Huffman & Richter, 2011:1325-1338).

It is crucial to understand that poverty not only affects children in child-headed households, poverty also plays a pivotal role in the formation of these households. Csáky (2014:25-33) highlights that poverty can encourage adult migration, leaving children in the care of grandparents or in residential care. The Every Child movement (2011a:211-213) confirms that there is a relationship between poverty and the loss of parental care. According to Every Child, poverty is the largest contributing factor when it comes to the loss of parental care and the institutionalisation of children. When a family is poor, the children and their parents or caregivers are exposed, however,

when parents leave, the situation becomes much worse, subjecting child-headed households to profound suffering that is characterised by extreme poverty and malnourishment (Blaauw et al., 2011:138-152). Therefore, it is safe to conclude, that children from child-headed households are extremely vulnerable, in that they have to live without parents or adult caregivers and because they are also exposed to extreme poverty.

### **3.3.2 Access to social grants**

A social grant is a monetary tool that is used to alleviate poverty. Social grants provide a minimum income sufficient enough to meet the basic subsistence needs of the beneficiary so as to prevent that person from living below minimum acceptable standards. As child-headed households are mostly vulnerable and exposed to extreme poverty and a variety of socio-economic issues, it should be evident that these households must have access to social grants (Hall et al., 2018:35-36). However, although social grants are an important source of income for millions of people in South Africa, child-headed households do not have easy access to this alleviating measure (Hall, 2018:22). This was already identified in 2012, when Mturi, Sekudu, and Kweka (2012:54-56) indicated that, although it would have been expected that child-headed households could benefit from certain grants, it appeared that in some instances, these children fail to access or adequately benefit from them for a variety of reasons.

The aim of social security is to assist families living in poverty. In 2013, UNICEF (2013b) established that approximately eleven million South African children were living in poverty. Approximately two million of those children were living in townships in backyard shacks with poor sanitation and little or no access to basic services such as water and electricity. Many of these poverty-stricken children live in child-headed households and are in extremely vulnerable positions. Therefore it is clear that social grants need to contribute to the eradication of the cycle of poverty and vulnerability in which these children find themselves (Blaauw et al., 2011:138-152) and it is critical to comprehend that sufficient access to social grants should be ensured to those children that have to go through life without any parents or adult caregivers.

### 3.3.3 Difficulty to complete or finish school

Access to schooling and achieving academically are both challenges for children in child-headed households. These factors have a significant effect on their education often making it difficult for them to finish school (Hall et al., 2018:36). Children from child-headed households do not overlook the importance of education by choice, they do so as a result of the difficult circumstances they are exposed to. The process of dropping out of school usually starts with them being absent from school more and more often, this negatively influence their academic performance which then ultimately leads to them leaving school (Pillay, 2016:1-8). Dropping out from school could also be associated with negative experiences at school. Pillay (2011:351-362) identified that children from child-headed households had negative experiences at school, including being treated badly by other learners, especially those that were living in better socio-economic circumstances than the children of child-headed households.

Moreover, a study in the Rakai district of Uganda found that children in child-headed households expressed a desire to attend school, however due to activities and demands from home the drop-out rate of these children were very high. It was established that children in child-headed households would abandon school, temporarily or permanently, in order to care for ill relatives or to manage the running of the household (Collins, Ellis, Pritchard, Jenkins, Hoeritzauer, Farquhar, Laverty, Murray & Nelson, 2016:58-63). The Rakai district study further confirmed that the eldest sibling (header) would sometimes pass over the opportunity to attend school in favour of a younger sibling. This clearly illustrates that household headers are particularly vulnerable to dropping out of school in order to care of their younger siblings who would then be able to continue with their education (Collins et al., 2016:58-63).

The assumption of parental roles takes a toll on the lives of headers of child-headed households in that, amongst other things, these roles not only interfere with the schooling of headers, they could contribute to them dropping out of school. Another aspect contributing to the possibility of headers of child-headed households dropping out of school is poverty. Without sufficient funds to cover the cost of schooling, including having to purchase books and stationery, the child will not be able to attend



school (Nziyane & Alpaslan, 2012:290-305). It is well known that education is regarded as a key factor in working towards a better future, however, children and specifically the headers of child-headed households, often have to abandon their education due to the circumstances they are confronted with, (Collins et al., 2016:58-63).

Section 28 of the South African Constitution points out that every child has the right to a basic education. This promise is not fulfilled in the case of children in child-headed households and especially the headers as there is a possibility that they would drop out of school because of household responsibilities. It can thus be concluded that the right to basic education for headers of child-headed households could be infringed upon.

### **3.3.4 Assuming adult roles**

Children have to assume adult roles in a child-headed household. Van Breda (2010:259-280) states that, following the death of their parents, it is expected of the eldest child to make the adjustment from being a child to be the header of the household. Role adjustment or assuming adult roles is a challenge in child-headed households and refers to a process whereby children in the household, especially the header, have to assume the role of an adult caregiver for tasks normally reserved for adults, such as providing care and support to their siblings and executing household responsibilities (Mturi, 2012:506-516). Children in child-headed households are compelled to look after themselves, therefore role changes and role overload are a reoccurring theme and have significant concerns for the headers of the households (Mogotlane et al., 2010:22).

Nziyane and Alpaslan (2012:290-305) found that performing the role of an adult caregiver is burdensome, difficult, challenging, stressful, and frustrating. As a result, the header of a household can easily succumb to pressure from having to deal with these extraordinary and demanding activities and because they are emotionally unprepared for the task. This can lead to the headers of child-headed households to become emotionally frustrated, which in turn can manifest in them having behavioural problems, such as being absent from school or abusing alcohol. Van Breda (2010:259-280) confirms that there are many emotional aspects that go hand in hand with role adjustments, such as the feeling of having lost one's childhood, of being abandoned

by extended family members who they feel should have been taking responsibility for them, of having to be responsible for one's family, and of taking the place of the deceased parents.

### **3.3.5 Economic vulnerability**

Economic vulnerability characterised by limited or no source of income is a huge challenge for child-headed households because their income generation is typically informal (Blaauw et al., 2011:138-152). South African research found that children in child-headed households normally engage in irregular jobs, for example as taxi conductors to generate an income to purchase basic items. These children would also sometimes be given gifts of money or food from relatives or neighbours, clearly reflecting their economic hardship (Mturi et al., 2012:54-56).

The fact that these children are active in the informal job market is a further concern. Blaauw et al. (2011:138-152) add that under normal circumstances one would not expect children under the age of 18 to be active in the labour market, but rather in school. However, child-headed households are not normal families, they are households where the header or responsible person for the welfare and survival of the rest of the household is in fact a child.

Section 28 of the South African Constitution states that every child has the right to be protected from exploitative labour practices, and that they are not required or permitted to perform work or provide services that are inappropriate for a person of that child's age, or place at risk the child's wellbeing, education, physical or mental health or spiritual, moral or social development (Republic of South Africa, 1996:14). However, because of their dire circumstances many children of child-headed households are economically exploited and thus do not enjoy the protection of section 28 of the South African Constitution.

Other consequences of the economic vulnerability of child-headed households are that they usually do not have access to basic nutrition, basic shelter, basic healthcare and social services. These shortages clearly do not conform to the provisions of section 28 of the Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996:13) that determines that every child has the right to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services and social services. This argument seems to be in line with the view of Skanfors (2009:1-22) who

stated that the lives of these children are characterised by poverty, deprivation, vulnerability, and the lack of opportunities in virtually all areas.

### **3.3.6 Sexual abuse**

Sexual abuse of a child by an adult who offers remuneration in cash or kind to the child or a third person can take on various forms, such as, child prostitution, child pornography, and child sex trafficking (McCoy & Keen, 2014:22). Child prostitution can be perceived in two ways; it can be regarded as child abuse, and as a form of child labour (Ward & Seager, 2010:85-100). Usually undertaken by children from child-headed households as a way to survive, it is also known as “survival sex” in that the child offers sex in exchange for money, gifts, food, shelter, clothes, or drugs and whether undertaken for survival or other reasons, child prostitution, according to the Children’s Act 38 of 2005, as amended by the Amendment Act 41 of 2007 is seen as the sexual exploitation of children (Wilkinson & Chiumia, 2013:10-18)

According to Spurrier and Alpaslan (2017:388-404) dysfunction within the family, poor circumstances at home, and the disintegration of the family, force children in child-headed households to engage in survival sex in order to provide for their basic needs. Moreover, Mturi et al. (2012:54-56) highlight that children in child-headed households suffer emotional and psychological abuse as they are exposed to the risk of being raped with some of female children that become pregnant and end up with children of their own. Children in child-headed households may be vulnerable to violence, abuse and exploitation, and experience high levels of anxiety, stress, or grief (Hall et al., 2018:36). It is important to understand that children in child-headed households live on their own with minimal parental or adult security and protection and as a result are easy targets for abuse and exploitation (Louw & Louw, 2014:404). This is not in line with section 28 of the South African Constitution which clearly states that every child has the right to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse, or degradation (Republic of South Africa, 1996:13).

## **3.4 SOCIAL SERVICES AVAILABLE FOR CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS**

Social services should be available to child-headed households as indicated by the Children’s Act. Authors mention that the delivery of social services for children should be prioritised and resources should be allocated to support this service delivery.

Furthermore, a clear distinction should be made between social services and social security as these are two different concepts that affect their recipients in different ways (Dutschke & Monson, 2008:25-26).

Pillay (2016:1-8) states that the lack of adequate social services, bereavement support and resources, have increased child-headed households' psychological and social challenges. Regarding social security, Hochfeld (2015:23-30) elaborates that while it is significant in promoting children's wellbeing, on its own it is unable to address the multifaceted needs of children and their families. Roelen et al. (2017:309-318) highlight that the nexus between social security, social services, and family support to enhance child wellbeing is important. It can thus be concluded that the link between social security and social services should not only be important but should be practically implemented to ensure that social services as well as social security are available to child-headed households.

### **3.4.1 SOCIAL SECURITY**

Social security is understood to be child support grants and other forms of grants made to support vulnerable children and their families (Giese, 2008:17-22). Social security provides assistance to the vulnerable. This social programme is in line with the rights-based perspective that allows vulnerable individuals to strengthen their capabilities and to enable them to exercise their rights. However, Phillips (2011:150) explains that children living in child-headed households generally have no access to grants as according to the South African Constitution they are seen as minors making them ineligible to apply for support on their own.

Brockerhoff (2013: 28-32) mentions the three main pillars of social assistance in South Africa, namely social old-age pensions, disability grants, and child and family grants which are all means-tested to ensure that they benefit the poorest. The social security grants that target children in need will now be discussed. They are the child support grant (CSG), care dependency grant (CDG), and foster care grant (FCG).

#### **3.4.1.1 Child support grant**

Literature confirms that the child support grant (CSG) is an important instrument of social protection in South Africa, reaching over 10 million South African children each

month. Although this grant was first introduced in 1998, it has since then evolved into one of the most comprehensive social protection systems in the developing world (Department of Social Development, 2012:1-7). The Western Cape Government (2019:1-3) mentions that the child support grant is aimed at lower income households and that it serves to help parents to cover the costs of basic needs for their children. In addition, it is revealed that the grant is not meant to replace other income but intended to bridge the gap in the cost of living. According to Phillips (2011:27) children in child-headed households generally have limited access to grants because they are minors and as a result are not allowed to apply for a grant. However, Geldenhuys (2016:25-28) mentions that children between the ages of 16 and 18 that head child-headed households, are eligible to apply for the child support grant with the assistance of a supervising adult such as a social worker.

#### **3.4.1.2 Care Dependency Grant**

The care dependency grant (CDG) is meant for children up to the age of 18 years who suffer from severe disabilities and who require permanent home-based care (Blaauw et al., 2011:138-152). Social grants are in place to improve standards of living and redistribute wealth to create a more equitable society (Kelly, 2017:4). Moreover, grants, such as the care dependency grant, are targeted at categories of people who are vulnerable to poverty and in need of state support of which the caregivers of children with disabilities is one example (Gauteng DSD Report, 2008: XV1). Children in child-headed households could also be in need of a specific grant as the care dependency grant as it would also help them to survive.

#### **3.4.1.3 Foster Care Grant**

Literature recognises that the foster child grant (FCG) is meant to benefit children who have been formally placed in the care of foster parents by the Children's Court. The foster care grant is payable for two years, as courts usually appoint foster parents for that duration. However, a social worker can ask for an extension of the foster care grant depending on the circumstances of each case (Department of Social Development, 2012:12-21).

As child-headed households are regarded as a form of family in the Children's Act they are theoretically eligible for one or more of the social grants. According to Geldenhuys

(2016:25-28) a foster care grant may only be obtained by the foster parents once a child is formally placed in their care. Blaauw et al. (2011:138-152) further elaborate that in the case of child-headed households, the court may grant community-based caregivers permission to care for children in child-headed households, but a report from a social worker has to accompany such applications so that the foster care grant can be received by children in child-headed households. Therefore, children in child-headed households who have not been assessed by a social worker according to section 150(2) of the Children's Act are left in more vulnerable conditions with no income as they do not have parents or caregivers and they are also technically not removed and placed in alternative care. Furthermore, these children will not have access to any of these grants if they do not have a supervising adult to assist with the application.

### **3.4.2 SOCIAL WORK SERVICES DELIVERED TO CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS**

Section 28 of the South African Constitution indicates that “every child has the right to social services”. According to UNICEF (2004:21) protecting children's rights requires sufficient resources, strategic planning, policy development, and execution. However, Kotze (2011:35-49) points out that the vulnerability and circumstances of child-headed households are appalling, despite promises made by governments and international bodies to secure the rights of children. In South Africa, these households are partly vulnerable because of a lack of support. In addition, Strydom, Spolander, Engelbrecht and Martin (2017:147) add that this comes as a result of not implementing the social developmental approach characterised by supportive services and family empowerment for the benefit and welfare of families and their children. Furthermore, it is important to notice that there is scarcity of literature looking into the social services delivered to headers of child-headed households.

According to the Department of Social Development (2011b:55), the term ‘social services’ is often used to refer to a group of services including education, health, housing, and social welfare services. Regarding child-headed households and social work services, section 150(2) of the Children's Act highlights that the child-headed household must be referred to a child protection social worker for investigation. If the social worker found that children in a child-headed household did not need care and

protection and where it subsequently was not necessary to place the children into alternative care, the social worker should where necessary, assist the children through counselling, prevention and early intervention services, family reconstruction, problem solving, and referral to another suitable qualified person or organisation.

This range of social work services is in line with the different levels of service delivery as set out in the Integrated Service Delivery Model (ISDM). The ISDM classifies developmental social service delivery by means of levels of intervention, namely prevention, early intervention, statutory intervention or residential or alternative care and reconstruction, and aftercare (Department of Social Development, 2013:28-29). The ISDM with its values and principles embedded in the Batho Pele principle of “people first”, aims to “provide a national framework that clearly determines the nature, scope, extent, and level of work that constitutes the service delivery model for developmental social services” (Department of Social Development, 2013:5-7). The levels of intervention as indicated by the ISDM, namely, prevention, early intervention, statutory, reunification, and aftercare will now be discussed.

Service delivery on the **prevention level** focuses on strengthening and building the capacity, self-reliance, and resilience of service beneficiaries while addressing individual, environmental, and societal factors to create conditions that enhance or support wellness (Department of Social Development, 2013:29). It is further mentioned that prevention services focus on preventing development needs to develop into social challenges or risks (Makoe, 2014:5). The Children’s Act clearly recognises the need to move from a reactive to proactive approach whereby focus is put on prevention services because the social problems which children are exposed to require policies that prioritise the implementation of effective prevention programmes (Makoe, 2014:5)

However, it seems as if there is a lack of literature on prevention programmes in South Africa concerning child-headed households. One option to support child-headed household in communities according to the World Bank, is home- and community-based care (HCBC). This type of care is seen as the best solution, as it is traditionally the extended family that steps in and assists affected children (Van Dijk, 2008:12-13). Germann (2005:37-39) agrees that home and community-based care not only



provides psychosocial care and support to children living in child-headed households, it also provides a package of services and support to the caregivers. Community-based care works by establishing and supporting small groups of child-headed households through, for example, housing schemes, providing free basic education, and preventing siblings' separation. Germann (2005: 37-39) emphasises that the following should be provided to address the socio-economic needs of these children; material, capital and spiritual support, access to support services, access to healthcare, food security, protection of inheritance, property rights, and support around psychosocial development, vulnerability, and resilience.

The importance of home and community-based care as a developmental approach to social welfare where the social welfare role of the state is reduced, is supported by several studies (Desmond & Quinlan 2002:35; Mkhize 2006:25; Germann 2005:37-39). In addition, it is believed that the needs and care of children living in child-headed households can best be addressed by the community and family and that these structures provide children with the most appropriate and adequate care (Kotze, 2011:35-49). This type of prevention service would create a support network around the child-headed household and would fit in with the requirement in the Children's Act that a range of support services should be available to the child-headed household. Furthermore, it will fit in with the Children's Amendment Act that states that a child-headed household must function under the general supervision of an adult designated by a children's court, an organ of state, or a non-governmental organisation determined by the provincial head of social development (Republic of South Africa, 2007:25). These households would then have access to social security.

The Department of Social Development (2013:29) highlights that services delivered at the level of **early intervention** focus on the early identification of risks, behaviour, and symptoms in individuals, groups, and organisations that could negatively impact on social wellbeing. It is further mentioned that early intervention services aim to limit the impact of risks and to prevent the development or progression of social problems. These interventions are designed to facilitate change in individual, environmental, and societal factors that could negatively impact on wellness. As mentioned earlier, section 150(2) of the Children's Act state that the social worker must take measures to assist children in child-headed households by providing counselling, mediation, early



intervention services, family reconstruction and rehabilitation, behaviour modification, problem solving and referral to another suitably qualified person or organisation (Republic of South Africa, 2005:64). It is thus important that social workers provide counselling and mediation on the early intervention level to prevent the escalation of problems. This means that social workers should assess the needs of the child-headed household and plan intervention according to these needs (Republic of South Africa, 2005:63-64). These services would be part of the service delivery of child protection workers at child and family welfare organisations.

The types of services that should be rendered by social workers to child-headed households are stipulated in the Children's Act. However, for those services to be rendered there must be a range of social service practitioners who could deliver services to children in the areas of prevention, early intervention, and protection because these services are labour intensive and effective delivery depends on the availability of skilled practitioners. As early as 2008, a critical shortage of personnel who could practice as social workers was reported (Loffel, 2008:83-91). Recently, the lack of people power in the delivery of child protection services was again acknowledged (South African Government, 2019:3). The shortage of social workers could mean that it would be difficult to offer social services to child-headed households as there are simply not enough social workers in South Africa. Research explains that due to this shortage it is possible for social workers to focus more on statutory cases, and less on prevention services, or early intervention services. This could also indicate that child protection workers do not have time for prevention services, or early intervention services, and are focussing more on crisis intervention (Strydom et al., 2017:145-158).

At the level where **statutory, residential, or alternative** care is required, the quality of life or social functioning of the service beneficiaries has already been compromised and require some form of alternative care (Department of Social Development, 2006:29). Statutory services are formulated in line with the Constitution of South Africa which aims to promote and protect the rights of children as well as to ensure that their best interests are considered in all matters (Songca, 2011:340-359). Statutory services are also in line with the Children's Act which identifies children in need of care and protection in section 150(1) and which further strives to provide for the

investigation of the conditions of children who might be in need of care and protection, including children in child-headed households and those who are victims of child labour (Republic of South Africa, 2005:63-64). However, the Children's Act states that children to be found in need of care and protection based on the grounds as identified in section 150(1) must be removed, but if the same grounds are to be found applicable to a child-headed household, the children may be removed. If the children are not removed and placed in alternative care, support services should be rendered. When the social worker investigates whether the children in a child-headed household is in need of care and protection, the section 7 of the Children's Act, namely best interest of the child principle, should be considered.

Section 7 of the Children's Act requires that the best interests of the child be considered when regarding the nature of the personal relationship between the child and the parents and the attitude of the parents or any specific caregiver towards the child, amongst other factors. In addition, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) also states the importance of considering the best interests of the child in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, or courts of law. The best interest of the children in a child-headed household should thus be determined by social workers on the grounds for a child to be in need of care and protection (section 150), as well as considering the relationships that the children in the child-headed household have with the parents or caregivers (section 7). Thus, the social worker must investigate the relationships or the bond that the child-headed household has with other family members or caregivers to come to a decision about removal of the children to alternative care, or not. If it is in the best interest of the children to stay in a child-headed household, support services should be delivered, and an adult could be appointed as caregiver (Republic of South Africa, 2007:25). It is furthermore important that social workers should adopt the rights-based perspective in service rendering to children and families as this perspective is based upon the values, standards, and principles reflected in the United Nations Charter and as this approach entails steps that must be taken to ensure that the rights of child-headed households are protected.

**Reunification and aftercare** services are about facilitating the reintegration into family and community life after separation. These services also refer to the building of

optimal self-reliance and social functioning in residential care (Department of Social Development, 2013:29). The aim of this level is to enable service beneficiaries who are headers of child-headed households to regain self-reliance and optimal social functioning in the least restrictive environment possible. It is pointed out that whereas the previous intervention aimed at providing alternative care that should, wherever possible, be a temporary measure, reunification and aftercare enable the affected children to return to the family or community as quickly as possible (Department of Social Development, 2013:30). It is vital to comprehend that children in child-headed households need a family in which to develop. Therefore, social workers should provide intensive services to promote an environment that allows these vulnerable children an opportunity to thrive in.

### **3.5 RIGHTS OF CHILDREN TO SOCIAL SERVICES**

Every child has the right to family care or parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment. Children also have the right to basic healthcare and social services (Republic of South Africa, 1996:13-14). According to Kotze (2011:35-49) the rights of millions of children to be free of abuse, exploitation, and violence, are compromised in totality by the loss of a traditional family environment. Furthermore, the rights of children in child-headed households to education, health, recreation, and stable social and family structures are violated by the role-reversal forced upon them (Maqoko & Dreyer, 2008:717-731).

Pillay (2011:351-362) argues that because the rights of children to social services are of paramount importance interventions must exist for each service layer to give full effect. Pillay adds that rights are fulfilled through state provisions to which all caregivers and their children are entitled to, such as education, health, and social services. Kotze (2011:35-49) states that realising children's rights is only possible through social, physical, psychological, and emotional protection of affected children and through addressing the gap between policies and the implementation of those policies.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 108 of 1996, makes provision for the protection of children. The Constitution requires that everything done by the administration or any public body that affects children must be in the best interests of

the child. Section 28, in particular, focuses on the rights of children and contains fundamental concepts, which have been developed by international treaties for the protection of children (South African Human Rights Commission, 2011:1-3). Literature confirms that the state has a direct duty to provide care and protection for children, especially those who do not enjoy family life, such as children in child-headed households.

In addition, it is mentioned that children's right to social services must be read in the context of the right to equality, meaning that children with any kind of disadvantage are entitled to extra protection to ensure that they have equal opportunities (Dutschke & Monsoon, 2008: 25-28). It is crucial to notice that by their very nature children are dependent on adults, therefore with the concept of developmental social welfare children's constitutional rights to protection and care, such as the right to family care and parental care, must specifically be considered (Blaauw et al., 2011:138-152).

### **3.6 CHALLENGES THAT INHIBIT EFFICIENT SOCIAL SERVICE DELIVERY**

Richter et al. (2006:32) mention the challenges that inhibit efficient social service delivery and explains that quick fix interventions in a response to the urgency of the situation, often attract attention and funding. The authors go on to argue that while short-term interventions may improve the situation, they do not address the core problems of the ongoing development of children and the needs of their families. There are multiple inter-related challenges concerning the delivery of social services to children in South Africa, especially when it comes to child-headed households. Three of the most vital challenges in the delivery of social services to children are described below.

#### **3.6.1 Lack of focus on social services**

Literature confirms that the social services arm of social development has lagged considerably behind the social security programme which has been a major success and an important component of the childcare and protection system (Dutschke & Monsoon, 2008: 23). According to the Department of Social Development (2009b:215), the progress in developing the social security system can be attributed to Government that invested more money in social security, while not attending to the delivery of social welfare service, especially to children.

According to Giese (2008:17-22) social services consist of a variety of interventions delivered through state and non-governmental social service practitioners as well as volunteers who support individuals, families, and communities who are at risk. The author goes on to explain that across all four levels of service delivery, the need for services far outweighs the capacity of the state to respond as adequate attention and resources have not been thoroughly allocated to social services. It is further argued by the Department of Social Development (2008:17-22) that the need for social services in South Africa is significant and on the increase as a result of the absence of substantially improved social services.

### **3.6.2 Insufficient resources**

It is mentioned that there are not enough resources available to protect children's wellbeing (Skhosana, Schenck & Botha, 2014:213-236). Effective social service delivery to the most vulnerable children and families in society is in short supply due to a lack of sufficient state capacity to deliver prevention and early intervention services (Velaphi, 2012:1-3). Social service professionals end up only responding to crises, thus disregarding prevention and early intervention services. These professionals have time only to render remedial services as opposed to the comprehensive developmental services that are legislated for in the Children's Act (Schmid, 2013:21). Furthermore, when organisations are not supported fully with resources and infrastructure to render effective and efficient welfare services it becomes difficult to implement developmental social work interventions in response to the needs of children through welfare services (Skhosana et al., 2014:213-236; Nhedz & Makofane, 2015:353-373). Insufficient resources make it difficult to address needs of children and their families and as a result social workers find it very challenging to implement certain sections of the Children's Act, especially section 150(2) in the case of child-headed households (Sibanda & Lombard, 2015:332-350).

### **3.6.3 Shortage of employed social service practitioners**

In literature about South African child welfare of more than a decade ago, it was mentioned that key challenges to social service delivery were amongst others, the shortage of social service practitioners, in particular social workers, social auxiliary workers, and child and youth care workers, making this shortage a national crisis

(Giese, 2008:17-22). Also in 2008, Loffel (2008:83-91) noted a critical shortage of personnel who can practice as social workers, and that if the challenge was not addressed as a priority, effective implementation of the Children's Act would not be possible as there were clearly not enough social workers in South Africa to deal with the huge demands for social services caused by widespread social problems. According to the Department of Social Development (2005:35-39) there were 11372 registered social workers in South Africa in 2005, and less than half of them (5063) were employed by the Department of Social Development or NPOs to deliver social services to vulnerable groups, including children. This meant that 6309 registered social workers were unemployed, further perpetuating the problem of not having enough social workers (Department of Social Development, 2005:35-39).

More recent literature from Nkosi (2018:1-2) highlights that South Africa has thousands of qualified social workers who are available to work but who are unemployed. In 2018 the number of unemployed social workers, who should be absorbed by the Department of Social Development, looked set to jump from 3 800 to 8 600. These statistics highlight the fact that the unemployment of social workers in South Africa is an ongoing issue that has not been addressed critically (Nkosi, 2018:1-2). In 2019 the South African Government (2019:3) stated that Minister Zulu of Social Development revealed that the employment of social workers was high on the agenda, with the necessary engagement across government and the private sector to deal with the challenge. However, to date no plan has been implemented to absorb social workers, despite social work being a critical skill and one of the most important professions that could contribute towards improving the lives of poor and vulnerable South Africans (South African Government, 2019:3). It can thus be concluded that South Africa has sufficient qualified social workers, but not the financial infrastructure to employ them.

### **3.7 LACK OF INTERGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY**

Integrated services that address economic, material, social, emotional, and spiritual needs best support the psychosocial wellbeing of children and their primary caregivers (Richter et al., 2006:7). The authors add that long-term investments in community development, health, education, and family support services are more sustainable and

successful than short-term, crisis-driven interventions. Lombard (2010:98) alludes that integrated approaches combining social and material support to caregivers and families are needed to improve the health and wellbeing of children in communities. These integrated approaches to support are best provided by local community-based organisations with family and community safety nets supporting the most vulnerable children. According to Strydom et al. (2017:145-158) the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) calls for strong inter-sectoral collaboration in recognition that services within a developmental social welfare system need commitment from a variety of departments and not only from the Department of Social Development so that a suitable environment can be provided for the physical, social and emotional development of all the members of the family. Furthermore, the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) tasked the Department of Social Development to negotiate the promotion of such a welfare model with other departments, in particular with the Department of Health and Education. Kotze (2011:35-49) emphasises that integrated development policies across all sectors should be formulated and implemented to promote poverty alleviation, security, and the protection of the rights of children of inter alia child-headed households. Government departments should thus endeavour to work together with other agencies to address the needs and problems experienced by children, families, and communities. There is lack of recent literature on integrated service delivery to respond to the plight of headers of child-headed households and their families.

### **3.8 CONCLUSION**

The needs and challenges of headers of child-headed households were described in this chapter in order to provide an understanding of their circumstances. In lieu thereof it was concluded that children in child-headed households have unsatisfied needs and face unaddressed challenges, making it difficult for them to grow, develop, and function optimally. The vulnerable conditions they live, in not only impact their experiences, they also affect the satisfaction of their needs, thus highlighting an urgent need of support in the form of social security and social work services. However, difficulty and challenges in responding to their need for social security and social work services infringes upon their rights. In Chapter 4, data obtained from the empirical

investigation about the experiences of headers of child-headed households in the Greater Sekhukhune district of Limpopo Province will be analysed.



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION ON THE EXPERIENCES OF HEADERS OF CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS AND SERVICES RENDERED TO THEM BY SERVICE PROVIDERS**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

An outline of the results obtained from the empirical investigation with regards to the experiences of headers of child-headed households and services rendered to them by service providers is provided in this chapter in order to meet the third objective of the research as established in Chapter 1. Data is be presented by means of figures and tables, as well as interpretations of narratives provided by the participants.

This chapter commence with a description of the research methodology utilised, thereafter the results from the empirical investigation will be divided into four main sections. The first section presents identifying particulars of the participants. In the second section, the nature of child-headed households is analysed from the participants' perceptions. The third section looks at the challenges of child-headed households, whereas the final (fourth) section focuses on social services needed.

Data presented in this chapter was collected through the use of a semi-structured interview schedule during a telephone interview conducted with headers of child-headed households in the Greater Sekhukhune District of the Limpopo Province. References to the literature study as provided in Chapters 2 and 3, and discussions regarding its relationship to the presented data is also provided. This will allow for appropriate deductions regarding the identified themes, sub-themes, and related categories, to be made.

#### **4.2 RESEARCH METHOD**

The empirical investigation was conducted as outlined in Chapter 1 of the research study. The research approach, including the research design, research method, and method of data analysis for the research study will now be discussed.

##### **4.2.1 Research sample**

The criteria for inclusion in the sample of the study was the following:

- Participants had to be headers of a child-headed households between the age of 19 and 22 years, who have been caring and looking after the children in the household from when the header was under the age of 18 years.
- Participants had to be living with the children in the house and had to be responsible for the day to day running of the household.

When the study was conducted, four participants between the age of 19 and 22 contacted the researcher, although they have been living alone without siblings. However, they saw themselves as a child-headed household and because they had been looking after themselves, without any parental support, since they were under the age of 18 years. According to the Children's Amendment Act the provincial head of the Department of Social Development may recognise a household as a child-headed household if the parent is terminally ill, has died, or has abandoned the children in the household, or if no family member is available to provide care for the children in the household (Republic of South Africa, 2007). Although these participants did not care for other children, their circumstances fit with this stipulation and they were therefore included in the study as they could be regarded as headers of an only child-headed household. After the interviews were conducted, it was clear that their experiences were similar to headers who looked after their siblings. They provided a different perspective, namely that not all headers of child-headed households were living with their siblings but that some were living by themselves.

#### **4.2.2 Research approach, design, and instrument**

The researcher made use of a qualitative research approach. The utilisation of this approach gave participants the opportunity to share their experiences, challenges, and opinions that led to an in-depth understanding about the research question. The utilisation of a qualitative research design also enhanced the study in that this particular design considers that there are multiple realities that different cultural groups construct on the basis of their world views or value systems. This was how the perceptions of headers of child-headed households were understood in this context (De Vos et al., 2011:142-144).

The researcher incorporated explorative and descriptive research designs that vary in many aspects (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006:23). Exploratory research entails gaining

insight into a situation, phenomenon, community, or individual, and was used in order to gather basic information about the experiences of headers of child-headed households (Blaikie, 2000:52-69). Descriptive research design was also utilised in the study in order to intensively examine the phenomena and its deeper meaning to lead to a further description (De Vos et al., 2011:96). The study made use of a semi-structured interview schedule during the telephone interview with headers of child-headed households to obtain information about their experiences (Appendix B).

#### **4.2.3 Data collection**

The researcher managed to interview headers of child-headed households from the Greater Sekhukhune District in Limpopo Province through the assistance of community leaders. The researcher obtained the contact numbers of community leaders from the Sekhukhune District Municipality website and called them to introduce himself and to introduce the study. Details about the research project were then provided and the researcher's interest to interview headers of child-headed households in the community was shared. A lack of familiarity with the population size and the members of the population led the researcher to utilise the snowball technique. This technique allowed the researcher to acquire participants and to ultimately request the community leader to assist in informing potential participants about the research project. Community leaders provided permission to the researcher to conduct the study in the community as they understood the importance of the study, and they agreed to help the researcher by informing potential participants about the study.

Due to the disruptive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher sent confidential letters through courier services to the community leader (Appendix D) alongside the informed consent forms (Appendix A) to hand deliver the documents to potential participants and subsequently request them to make contact with the researcher if they were interested in taking part in the study. The challenging part of this process was acquiring participants, especially waiting for them to call or send a message confirming their availability for an interview. Another challenging part was that it took over two months to complete nineteen interviews because most participants would not call back or send a message. The researcher managed this challenge by remaining focused and having patience and belief that potential participants will emerge as trust was put in the research methods utilised to recruit participants. The

researcher also continued searching for potential participants through the assistance of the community leader. Another challenge that the researcher faced was financial challenges, these included courier costs for the documents that had to be sent to the community leader and back to the researcher, as well as airtime to make calls to potential participants.

Data collection took place in the form of telephone interviews as face-to-face data collection was suspended by the Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee (REC) due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown and social distancing protocols. The researcher made use of a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix B) during the telephone interviews with headers of child-headed households. Each telephone interview was successful as participants managed to share adequate information about their experiences as headers of child-headed households. The telephone interviews were conducted from the researcher's private room in a university residence. The room was entirely appropriate for conducting telephone interviews and had adequate network connection with minimal disturbances. During the telephone interviews the researcher made notes on each interview schedule and recorded each interview fully on a recording device to be able to look at the notes and listen to the recordings when analysing the data. Data saturation was reached by the thirteenth interview when no new information was emerging from the data obtained. The researcher continued with interviews until the nineteenth interview in order to find out if any new information would emerge, however that was not the case and it could be concluded that data saturation was reached.

#### **4.2.4 Data analysis**

The data collected was analysed qualitatively as the study utilised a qualitative approach. The interview between the researcher and the participant was audio-recorded and observed with less intrusion. The interview was on speaker mode and field notes were made to ensure that all data was collected. The researcher further transcribed the data collected during interviews into a word processing package. This process involved having to clearly decide what level of detail was necessary with regards to the interpretation and representation of the data (De Vos et al., 2011:406-407). Moreover, the researcher coded the collected data into themes by looking for similar words or phrases mentioned by the participants during the interviews. Once

the words and phrases were highlighted, they were put into themes, sub-themes, and categories (Creswell, 2007:150-155). The themes, sub-themes, and categories were presented in a table and the narratives of the participants were used to describe and illustrate the data collected.

### 4.3 RESULTS OF THE STUDY

In this section the results of the study is discussed. The profile of the participants are also discussed, followed by a discussion of the other themes and sub-themes that emerged in the study.

#### 4.3.1 Profile of participants

Participants were asked to indicate their identifying details, that is, number of years as a header of the household, gender, current age, occupation, age when they became the header of their respective households, and number of other family members (siblings) that live in the household and their age.

Table 4.1: Identifying details of research participants

Participant	Number of years as header of the household	Gender	Current age	Age when participant became the header of the household	Occupation	Number of other family members living in the household	Age of other family members living in the household
1	3	Male	20	17	Grade 12	2	17, 19
2	3	Male	19	16	Grade 10	2	6, 13
3	4	Male	19	15	Grade 12	1	13
4	5	Male	22	17	Unemployed	1	19
5	5	Male	22	17	Unemployed	3	6, 11, 18
6	5	Female	22	17	Unemployed	1	18

7	6	Female	22	16	Farmworker	2	1, 6
8	5	Female	22	17	Unemployed	3	1, 2, 13
9	2	Male	19	17	Grade 12	1	10
10	4	Male	21	17	Unemployed	1	17
11	6	Female	22	16	General worker home-based care	3	3, 6, 19
12	5	Male	21	16	Unemployed	1	19
13	3	Male	20	17	Grade 10	1	17
14	2	Male	19	17	Grade 11	1	16
15	2	Female	19	17	Grade 11	1	17
16	2	Male	22	17	Unemployed	0	0
17	6	Male	22	16	Unemployed	0	0
18	4	Female	19	15	Grade 10	0	0
19	6	Female	21	15	Grade 11	0	0

#### 4.3.1.1 Number of years as a header of the household

Participants were asked to indicate the number of years that they had been headers of their households. Most of the participants indicated that they had been headers of their households for five years. A few participants had been headers of their households for three years, and another few participants had been headers of their households for two years. Only four participants had been headers of child-headed households for six years, the longest duration recorded in the collected data.

The above findings reflect the inclusion criteria, namely that headers should be between the ages of 19 and 22 and must have occupied the role of header of a child-headed household when they were younger than 18 years old. The fact that most of

the participants occupied this role for the past five years indicate that headers of child-headed households have adequate experience in heading their households. They had an understanding about their experiences and were able to articulate their needs and challenges as well as social services rendered to them by social service professionals.

#### **4.3.1.2 Gender of participants**

Participants were asked to indicate their gender. Most of the participants were males (12), with a minority of the participants that were females (7). It can thus be concluded that a high number of males headed their household.

#### **4.3.1.3 Current age of participants**

The participants were asked to indicate their current age. Most of the respondents indicated that they were between the ages of 21 and 22 years. Few of the participants further indicated that they were between the ages of 19 and 20 years. Overall, the participants were ranged from 19 to 22 years of age, as stated in the inclusion criteria.

The fact that most of the participants in the study group started to head their families when they were as young as 16 or 17 years, indicated that there could be many headers of households that were 18 years old and younger. This was confirmed when two children of 18 years and younger contacted the researcher and offered to take part in the study because they were already heading their households in the Greater Sekhukhune District of Limpopo Province. The researcher explained that they could not be interviewed due to the inclusion criteria.

#### **4.3.1.4 Age when participants became the header of the household**

Participants were asked to indicate at what age they became the headers of their households. Most of the participants became headers of their households when they were 17 years old. Furthermore, a minority of the participants became headers of their households when they were 16 years old. Only three participants became a header of the child-headed household when they were 15 years old

It can thus be stated that some of the participants were according to the Children's Amendment Act (Act 41 of 2007) younger than the provision made in the Act which states that a child should be over the age of 16 years when assuming the role of caregiver in a child-headed household. All these participants were denied their sense

of childhood from an early age as they had to assume adult roles while they were merely children. According to the Children's Act, a person is a child when under the age of 18 and is therefore in need of care and protection if they are without parents.

#### **4.3.1.5 Occupation of participants**

Participants were asked to specify their occupation. A majority of the participants are attending secondary school. Therefore, they are obliged to divide their attention between schoolwork and household chores. A few of the participants are unemployed clearly reflecting their economic challenges as they go through life without sustainable employment. The minority of the participants are employed.

#### **4.3.1.6 Number of other family members (siblings) that live in the household**

The participants were asked to identify the number of other family members in their households. Most of the participants (9) headed households with only one sibling. Few of the participants (3) headed households with two siblings and another few of the participants (3) headed households with three siblings.

It can be concluded that these participants have a huge responsibility in responding to the needs of their siblings, especially those who live with more than one sibling. As explained, there were also four participants emerged who were living alone without siblings. These participants featured in the study because they saw themselves as headers of an only child-headed household and their experiences were similar to the headers who were caring for children. They were between the age of 19 and 22 years and have been looking after themselves since they were under the age of 18 years.

#### **4.3.1.7 Age of other family members (siblings)**

The participants were asked to indicate the age of the other family members in the household. Most of the participants (9) indicated that their siblings were between the age of 14 and 19 years old. The minority (4) of the participants had siblings between the ages of 9 and 13 years of age. A few participants indicated that their siblings were between the ages of 1 and 8 years old. It can be concluded that participants were responsible for children in different phases of life. Participants could feel challenged as they had to fulfill parental roles to siblings in different life phases, while they also needed caregivers who could look after their needs.



#### 4.4 THEMES, SUB-THEMES AND CATEGORIES

The themes, sub-themes and categories derived from the data are indicated in Table 4.2.

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories
<b>1. Circumstances that caused the header to become the head of the household</b>	(a) Mother died	(i) Father non-resident in the house
	(b) Both parents had died	(i) Left alone with siblings
	(c) Mother or father is ill	(i) Responsible for care and household
	(d) Mother works away from the household or is a migrant labourer	(i) Mother absent from household
<b>2. Time immediately after being left without parents</b>	(a) Assume adult or caregiver responsibility	(i) Had to provide support and care for siblings
		(ii) looked for part-time employment
		(iii) Seek assistance/help
<b>3. Daily responsibilities in the household and assistance from outside</b>	(a) Responsible for domestic chores	(i) Shared responsibility between header and siblings
	(b) Assuming adult roles	(i) Obligated to take place of parents
		(ii) Difficult to perform adult roles
	(c) Friends assisted from outside family	(i) Provide emergency assistance and help with decision making
<b>4. Help that would improve everyday life</b>	(a) Fulfill material needs	(i) Need for food
		(ii) Need for clothes

		(iii) Need for adequate shelter
		(iv) Need for further education
	(b) Need for employment (economic sustainability)	(i) Need for a stable income
<b>5. Daily challenges in the household</b>	(a) Trying to survive without money	(i) Finding food to eat
		(ii) Unable to find employment
<b>6. Financial challenges</b>	(a) Unstable financial support from extended family	(i) Unstable support from family members on a monthly basis
		(i) Irregular income from part-time jobs
	(b) Insufficient income to buy food, electricity, and clothes	(i) Basic expenses between R400 and R1500
		(ii) Types of food bought
		(iii) Lack of clothing
<b>7. School attendance situation in household</b>	(a) Siblings attend school	(i) Siblings in primary and secondary school
	(b) Header attends school or completed school	(i) Header in secondary school or completed matric
	(c) Header dropped out of school	(i) Difficulty to finish school
<b>8. Experiences of header as head of household</b>	(a) Lack of adult/parental guidance and care	(i) Absence of parents
	(b) Education influenced by household responsibility	(ii) Taking care of the children makes it impossible to attend school and extra classes

<b>9. Service rendering to household</b>	(a) Lack of social services	(i) Lack of social work services
	(b) Lack of social security	(i) Challenging to access social grants
	(c) Awareness about services that should be rendered	(i) Limited knowledge about social work services
<b>10. Rights as a header of child-headed household</b>	(a) Limited knowledge about rights as a header	(i) No awareness of rights, acceptance of circumstances
<b>11. Important needs</b>	(a) Three types of material needs	(i) Food, clothes, and shelter

### **4.3.2 Nature of child-headed households**

This section explores the participants' perceptions on the nature of child-headed households, with emphasis on the circumstances that caused the header to become the head of the household, what happened after being left as the header, daily responsibilities in the household, outside assistance when in need of help, and help that would improve everyday life.

#### **4.3.2.1 Circumstances that caused the header to become the head of the household**

Child-headed households are exposed to a variety of difficult circumstances, with some children living without parental care. Thus, participants were asked to describe the circumstances that caused them to become the headers of their households. The sub-themes and categories identified within this theme are presented in Table 4.2

##### **(a) Sub-theme: Mother died**

The first sub-theme that was identified within the circumstances that caused the header to become the head of the household, was that of a mother who died. One category emerged from this sub-theme.

**(i) Category: Father non-resident in the house**

The first category to be identified was that the participants' fathers were non-resident in the household, which meant that there was no other adult to take care of them. The participants cited several reasons that led to their fathers being absent. Participants mentioned:

"My father does not stay with us." (P8)

"My father is around, but him and my mother were no longer in a relationship, so he does not live with us." (P4)

Other participants indicated that there were no relationships with their fathers, that they did not know him, and that their father's absence in their lives led the participants to become the headers of their households after their mothers died. These participants mentioned:

"...like my father left us, he does not care about us, it's like I do not have a father and he stopped caring long time ago and now we are left by ourselves..." (P9)

"...then my father I do not know him..." (P1)

It was found that child-headed households were formed because the mother had died, and the father had already been absent from the household. This is supported in South African literature, as Makiwane and Berry (2013:1-8) as well as Hall (2018:10) conclude that most South African children grew up in families where their fathers were either non-resident in their homes or absent from their lives. It is further important to note that the relationship between the mother and father was already non-existent, to such an extent that the father was not involved in the household. It could thus be derived that there was also no relationship with the children and no support coming from the fathers.

**(b) Sub-theme: Both parents had died**

The second sub-theme that was identified, was that both parents had died. One category emerged from this sub-theme.

**(i) Category: *Left alone with siblings***

The category that emerged was that headers of child-headed households were left alone with their siblings after both parents had died.

The participants would say that:

“...both my parents passed away, one in 2012 and the other in 2015...” (P11)

“...my father and my mother passed away...” (P5)

Some of the participants indicated that they were living with their parents, as well as other family members, but that they all died.

“I used to stay with my mother, father and grandmother but they all passed away and we started living with the aunt I mentioned, and she passed away also hence why we ended up here.” (P13)

“...and we then moved to stay with our grandmother, but she also passed away...” (P1)

One of the participants also mentioned that they were living with other family members for a while, but that they had moved back to their family house to be alone.

“...my mother and father died when I was young, we used to stay with my aunt but then we moved from there to come and stay in our mother’s house...” (P10)

The finding that participants were left alone with siblings after both parents had died, corresponds with Songca (2011:340-359) who said that child-headed households were living without parents, due to different reasons, such as parents who had died. This study also confirmed that children were left alone not only because their mothers had died, but because other caregivers, such as their fathers, grandmothers, and aunts, left the children with no other option than to live on their own.

**(c) Sub-theme: *Mother or father is ill***

The third sub-theme was that there was only one parent in the house (mother or father) and that this parent was ill, which led to the participant becoming the header of the household. One category is identified below.

**(i) Category: Responsible for care of parent and household**

The first category that emerged was that some of the participants had to take responsibility to care for their ill parents as well as the household. Participants indicated:

“...my mother fell ill and after being taken for medical attention, her condition is not healed so I am taking care of her alongside my younger sister.” (P2)

“...my mother got sick, I started taking her to hospital for treatment, looking after her and my stepsister alongside my child. (P7)

Despite the fact that the participants had to look after parents with health problems, one of the participants further highlighted that their parents were in the elderly life phase and with the parents being ill they had to step up and not only look after the parents being old and fragile, but also the household and their siblings. They further mentioned that their parents depended on them for support and care, clearly reflecting the fact that they are seen as the header of the household and are thus also responsible for to look after the parents and the household.

“I am taking care of my elderly father and my sister’s child and have been doing that for years. Living with my elderly father is very difficult, sometimes he gets extremely sick, I get worried thinking that I will be left alone if he dies.” (P6)

It was found that some of the parents of some of the participants were alive but that they were either in ill health, or in the elderly life phase, thus making the participants responsible for their parent. This is reflected in literature that states that children in child-headed households often take care of other children and/or adults, ending up with responsibilities that are not appropriate for their developmental phase (Evans, 2011:348-396). In this study, it was confirmed that the parents of some of the participants were ill and could not take care of themselves, leaving the child to take over and to accept all the responsibilities.

**(d) Sub-theme: Mother works away from the household or is a migrant labourer**

The fourth sub-theme that was identified regarding the circumstances that led the header to be the head of the household, was that the mother was working far away

from the household, or that she was a migrant labourer. One category emerged from this sub-theme.

**(i) Category: Mother absent from household**

The first category under this sub-theme was that the mother was absent from the household. One participant cited that their mother was not coming home often, due to working far away from home, and that this led the participant to be the header of the household. The participant stated:

“My mother is working in the city and does not come home often.” (P12)

“My mother had to go to Pretoria and look for a job, my mother is working there, and I am just alone here at home.” (P17)

Some participants mentioned that the difficulty of growing up in poverty was a driving factor behind their mother’s decision to leave home and work in the city. Their parents working in the city with the attempt to respond to their socio-economic challenges meant not being able to go home regularly, thus leaving them as headers of the households.

“My mama was not working when she was staying with us and she realised that it is tough (poverty) then she decided to go and look for a job, now she is working in Joburg and she sometimes come to see us at the end of the month.” (P4)

Some participants mentioned that their sisters were also working in the city and that they, therefore, did not only look after their own siblings, but also after their older sisters’ children. They stated that their sisters did not come home often and left their children behind in the care of the participants.

“My mother is working and only comes at the end of each month. My sisters are not here, they are also working and leave their children with me, they come home once in a while, because they work far from home.” (P8)

“My older sister and brother were looking after us after my grandmother passed away but they also had to leave us behind and go to the city to look for a job, they do find part time jobs, but they are also struggling and do not come home often.” (P15)

The finding that mothers were working far away from the household and did not come home often, leaving the eldest child as the header of the household, is confirmed by Seepamore (2015:571-584), and Mogotlane et al. (2010:24-42), who said that the outcome of migrant labour was that parents are often not present in households and not involved in the management of the household. Another important finding is that some of the participants were also taking care of their sister's children, who were also working away from home. Participants were thus also taking responsibility for children from different family members. From the above narratives it is clear that the participants fit the requirements to be recognised as a child-headed household as indicated in the Children's Amendment Act 41 of 2007, as they became the headers of the household because their parents, guardians, or care-givers were either ill, had died, or had abandoned the children in the household and no adult family member was available to provide care for the children.

#### **4.3.2.2 Time immediately after being left without parents**

Participants were asked to describe what happened in the time immediately after they were left without parents. The sub-themes and categories identified within this theme are presented in Table 4.2

##### **(a) Sub-theme: Assume adult/caregiver responsibility**

The first and only sub-theme that was identified regarding what happened in the time after being left without parents, was that participants indicated that they assumed the responsibilities of adults or caregivers. Three categories emerged from this sub-theme.

##### **(i) Category: *Had to provide support and care for siblings***

The first category under this sub-theme was that participants provided support and care to their siblings after being left as a header. Participants indicated that being left as a header of their household meant they had to remain in their household and care for their siblings as there was no other alternative at their disposal. Narratives are:

*"I just remained in the house with my younger sister and took full responsibility of everything in the house. There was nothing else that can be done but to continue living and caring for my sister. I was managing my time very well, I ensured that I divide my*



time into studying, doing house chores and checking if everything is fine in the house.”

(P4)

“There was nothing I can do, I had to look after my siblings.” (P2)

A few participants mentioned that they had no option as being the eldest child in the household led to a process whereby, they had to execute caregiver roles and care for their siblings. Participants indicated:

“...I was the only one who was a bit grown up, I did the necessary house chores and provided care for them.” (P6)

“...as soon as my sister and brother left, I remained behind with my younger brother and we lived alone, as a big sister I had to take care of him and look after the house.” (P15)

The finding that participants had to provide support and care for their siblings, because there was nobody else and because they had no other option, is supported by Mogotlane et al. (2010:24-30). The authors found that the head child was obligated to care and support their siblings and subsequently fulfilled the role of the parent. From the participants' views it was also clear that they had to provide support and care for siblings after being left as headers of their households. This finding also correlates with other South African literature that agrees that children in child-headed households execute parental duties in the absence of their parents (Nziyane & Alpaslan, 2012:290-305).

## **(ii) Category: Looked-for part-time employment**

The second category under this sub-theme is that participants tried to find part-time employment. Participants mentioned that they had to search hard for employment and actually found part-time work after being left as a header of the household and because suddenly they were responsible to provide their siblings with food to fulfill their nutritional needs. One participant said:

“I also had to go out and look for work around and found one which was temporary at this women empowerment project (home-based care) so that we can at least have

money and buy something to eat at night. That was not the only one because I kept on trying to survive by getting part-time jobs." (P6)

"...we just continued with life, nothing much happened, I just had to search for part-time jobs around actually did part-time jobs whereby..."

A few participants mentioned that they had to engage in a variety of part-time employment opportunities to take care of the household. The participants said:

"...sometimes I wash cars in order to make some money and provide in the house."

"...yeah, I do get piece jobs and make some money, I do piece jobs like cleaning people's yards." (P2)

"I was making bricks for other people and also cleaning other people's yards." (P13)

The finding that headers of child-headed households had to look for part-time employment to take care of their siblings in the time immediately after they were left without parents, is in line with literature on child-headed households, that in order for children in child-headed households to make ends meet, they normally settle for part-time employment. However, because the participants were often younger than 18 years old, these part-time opportunities could be exploitative (Nyaradzo, 2013:47-53). It can thus be stated from the participants' views that they are vulnerable to exploitative labour as they try to find money and survive in the absence of their parents (Nyaradzo, 2013:47-53; Pillay & Nesengani, 2006:131-147).

### **(iii) Category: Seek assistance or help**

The third category under this sub-theme is that participants looked for assistance or help after being left as headers of child-headed households.

Some of the participants mentioned that after being left as the header of the household, some relatives attempted to assist, however their assistance did not materialise, which motivated participants to seek help elsewhere. The participants indicated that:

"...few relatives came in but nothing much was done so I had to look for assistance, you see here there are those people who work for home base or social workers, I went there to ask for help." (P11)

"My aunt is the one who assists me, when I have nothing, I ask her, when I need anything in terms of money or food, I go to her, any kind of support I need, I go to her."  
(P2)

Other participants mentioned that family members assisted them:

"...we were left by ourselves we looked for help from our aunt who really helped us, she gave me money, R700, R300 for rent and we used the remaining for food, she has been helping us the most." (P9)

"There is my aunt who is staying nearby us, I go to her whenever I need help and she does assist us." (P1)

"Whenever I have problems, I call my aunt's children, they give me support, they provide comfort and when I need money, I also call them, and they provide and enable me to buy what I need." (P6)

A further few participants mentioned that they looked for assistance from a variety of sources and added that they accepted any type of help they were given because their difficult situations did not allow them to be selective.

"...we were struggling, I would request food from the neighbours, or we would eat with the neighbours. Sometimes I would ask for help from my boyfriend and he would just assist me with R100 so that I can buy some maize meal. I also asked for assistance from my friend's mother who used to work at the school, and she will give us cabbages and soup from the school feeding scheme." (P7)

"My uncle and my mother came in to assist in terms of trying to provide food, even if it was not a consistent process meaning that they did not do that every month, it is not a must for them to provide." (P16)

Mturi et al. (2012:54-56) found that that headers of child-headed households utilised various sources of assistance in the time immediately after they were left without parents, ranging from family members, to neighbours and friends. It seems as if children in child-headed households are assisted by different individuals including, relatives, neighbours, or friends and boyfriends. It can be said that although children

in child-headed households live in difficult circumstances they receive assistance from family members and friends as stated in their interviews.

#### **4.3.2.3 Daily responsibilities in households and assistance from outside**

The header of the household has certain daily responsibilities that must be executed. Participants were asked to describe their everyday responsibilities in the household. The sub-themes and categories identified within this theme will now be discussed.

##### **(a) Sub-theme: Responsible for domestic chores**

The first sub-theme is that the headers have to take responsibility for domestic chores. One category emerged from this sub-theme, namely shared responsibility between header and siblings.

##### **(i) Category: *Shared responsibility between header and siblings***

The first category to be identified was that both header and siblings were responsible for domestic chores. Some of the participants indicated that they shared the household chores with their siblings and that they adequately divided these chores between them to ensure that everyone takes responsibility for a task in the household. Participants said:

*"...hmmm, we assist each other in terms of cleaning, cooking, we share the household chores since it is just the two of us."* (P10)

*"...my younger brother is in matric now and does not have time to do all the chores in the house, sometimes me and my younger brother, we share the duties but I normally do those that are difficult like fetching fire woods, we also assist each other with cooking and cleaning as well as the laundry..."* (P12)

Other participants indicated that sharing responsibility meant changing household tasks between them to avoid a process whereby the header or siblings perform the same role repeatedly.

*"It is a lot but me and my younger sister, we assist each other, like we change roles, when I cook, she cleans, vice versa."* (P14).

*“I study, clean, cook and do laundry, my brother also does the same, we assist each other because there is no way I can do everything by myself in the house.” (P15)*

The finding that headers and siblings share the responsibilities for domestic chores contradicts existing literature on child-headed households. German (2005:364) states that younger children in the household tend to be responsible for domestic chores including, cooking, doing laundry, and cleaning while the head-child is responsible for finding job opportunities to financially support the household. Thus, it can be stated that in this study group, the header does not only focus on income generation but also take responsibility of the household chores. The headers are thus burdened with multiple responsibilities.

### **(b) Sub-theme: Assuming adult roles**

The second sub-theme that emerged in the theme about everyday responsibility in the household was that headers of child-headed households assume adult roles. Two categories emerged from this sub-theme.

#### **(i) Category: *Obligated to take place of parents***

The first category under this sub-theme is that headers of child-headed households are obligated to take the place of their parents. Some of the participants stated that their everyday responsibility in the household obligated them to take the place of their parents in their attempt to respond not only to their needs but also to the needs of their siblings. These participants went on to describe that assuming adult roles meant that they had to play parent to their siblings and also deal with household responsibilities, and that they feel as if everything is their responsibility.

*“...because I am like a mother and a father at the same time, and everything in the household is looking at me.” (P12)*

*“...looking after the house and siblings make you become a parent while you are still young, and everything is facing you” (P11)*

Other participants expressed their challenges with regards to the process of assuming adult roles and admitted that they were still young and needed care, however the situation they were exposed to prematurely graduated them into adulthood as they

were obligated to take care of their households and look after their siblings. From the narratives it is clear that they were finding this responsibility difficult.

“First of all, I am still a child, I also need support, but already I have a house I need to take care of and children to look after.” (P6)

“I can say it is not nice because you have to do everything by yourself, when, I still have to look after my sister, I had to be a man and a child at the same time.” (P3)

The finding that headers of child-headed households are obligated to take the place of their parents is in line with literature of child-headed households where it is indicated that children are expected to assume the role of the head of the family and to leave their life as a child behind (Van Breda, 2010:259-280; Nziyane & Alpaslan, 2012:290-305). Furthermore, it was also found that the headers are aware that their situation is not normal. They are aware that they are still children and that they are forced into adulthood and they find the role reversal difficult to manage.

## **(ii) Category: Difficult to perform adult roles**

The second category under this sub-theme of assuming adult roles is the difficulty in performing adult roles. Participants elaborated the difficulty of performing adult roles. They clarified that it is not easy to perform adult roles, especially looking after siblings whilst ensuring that the households were well taken care of. A specific aspect that came to the fore is role overload and the difficulty in finding a balance between the different responsibilities. This is clear from the narratives below:

“It is hard, sometimes I spend a lot of time thinking about my situation. There are times whereby there is no food in the house and there is nothing I can do, that is difficult, it makes the situation worse.” (P9)

“...having to cook, clean and then study, balancing that already is difficult... (P7)

Some of the participants mentioned that it was challenging to find a balance between the household responsibilities and going to school and that they worry about household chores while in school. It was mentioned that trying to find a balance between challenging schoolwork and having to perform adult roles are difficult, and it affects the child's education. The participants had the following to say:

“...hey! it is difficult because you cannot look after the house and attend school at the same time even when you are at school, you are thinking about the household chores and struggle to concentrate.” (P13)

“It is hard, on this side you have schoolwork that you have to do, on this side you have to cook for the family to eat.” (P2)

It is clear that headers of child-headed households are experiencing role overload and finding it difficult to performing adult roles at the same time. This is in agreeance with literature that indicated that children in child-headed households find the execution of adult roles to be burdensome, difficult, challenging, stressful, and frustrating (Nziyane & Alpaslan, 2012:290-305) It was also found that this role overload usually has an impact on the head child’s school attendance as they find it difficult to keep up with the schoolwork and household responsibilities.

### **(c) Sub-theme: Friends assisted from outside family**

The third sub-theme under daily responsibilities in the household is assistance from friends. One category emerged from this sub-theme.

#### **(i) Category: Provide emergency assistance and help with decision making**

The only category that was identified was the provision of emergency assistance and decision making. Most of the participants indicated that when they needed assistance outside their household, they normally depended on their friends to provide tips and advice, especially when they had to make decisions about their everyday challenges.

“...my friend is the one who assists me, he is the one who showed me that smoking is not a good thing. I take him as my brother, we have known each other for a long time.” (P4)

“...my friend is the one who assists me, no one else, for example, if I need to attend something and it is an emergency, I ask her to look after the kids and then I get that done.” (P8)

One of the participants mentioned that her boyfriend plays a huge role in assisting and stated money as the form of assistance normally provided.

“...there is someone who assist me, yeah my boyfriend, he assists me with money when I need it.” (P11)

The fact that these households are assisted by friends, confirms that these households are not functioning under the general supervision of an adult designated by a children’s court, or an organ of state, or a non-governmental organisation determined by the provincial head of social development as stipulated in the Children’s Amendment Act (Act 41 of 2007) (Republic of South Africa, 2007:25). These children in child-headed households were also not referred to a designated child protection worker for investigation as indicated in section 150(2) in the Children’s Act. The Children’s Amendment Act is thus clear that child-headed households should have adult assistance to fulfil the parental role as indicated in section 28 of the Constitution and that this person must be a fit and proper person to be allowed to supervise a child-headed household.

#### **4.3.2.4 Help that would improve everyday life**

Child-headed households are deprived of parental or adult care and end up living by themselves, exposed to multiple challenges. It is crucial to understand the type of help they need in order to effectively respond to their needs. Participants were asked to explain the help that would improve their everyday life. The sub-themes and categories identified within this theme are presented in Table 4.2

##### **(a) Sub-theme: Fulfill material needs**

The first sub-theme under theme of help that would improve everyday life is to fulfill material needs. Four categories emerged from this sub-theme.

##### **(i) Category: Need for food**

Participants stated that the first thing that comes to mind when they are asked about the type of help, is food. They mentioned:

“...provide us with food, that is the main need in our house because there are times whereby, we have nothing to eat.” (P1)

“...food, we could really appreciate food, that is all I can say.” (P15)



One of the participants highlighted that there are times when the household has to go through days without anything to eat. The narrative is:

“...at least if we can just get adequate food, it is tough to go through the days sometimes with nothing to eat as our food runs out.” (P2)

One of the participants further mentioned that, although their mother was still alive and working away from home, the financial support they received from her was not sufficient and that they still struggled with an inadequate food supply. The participant said:

“...well I think sufficient food because that is one thing my mother struggles with.” (P12)

The finding that food security is the most important need of child-headed households, is confirmed by Mogotlane et al. (2010:193-20). Literature further confirms that children from child-headed households often go without food for days as indicated by one of the participants (Phillips, 2011:140; Maqoko & Dreyer, 2008:717-731). This finding clearly shows that children's right to basic nutrition is violated and in contravention of section 28(1)(c) of the South African Constitution which section clearly states that every child has the right to basic nutrition (Republic of South Africa, 1996:13-17).

## **(ii) Category: Need for clothes**

The second category to be identified was that participants have a need for clothes as they rarely buy clothes because most of the money at their disposal is spent on food. Participants cited:

“...for me if we can just have clothes, everything will be fine because that is one of the things we struggle with especially since we do not have enough money to buy what we need.” (P13)

“My mother is the only one who is working and since she is struggling with buying us food, she also struggles with buying us clothes, and she does not have sufficient money to buy for every one of us.” (P12)

The finding that participants have a need for clothes is in line with literature about the challenges that child-headed households have to face, specifically the shortage of clothes due to a lack of financial means (Mogotlane et al., 2010:193-20). It is clear that they are living in severe poverty where the money is not sufficient to buy food, let alone clothes.

**(iii) Category: Need for adequate shelter**

The third category to be identified was that participants indicated a need for shelter. Participants stated that they need shelter because their current living conditions are not appropriate, housing are too small or dilapidated. Participants mentioned:

“We really need housing also because since the government built us an RDP house, they did not even put roofing on it even now, the house we live in, the roof is leaking and when there is wind, it seems as if it will be taken by the wind.” (P2)

“...we also need adequate shelter because right now we are basically living in a shack house which is small and not fine.” (P1)

One of the participants elaborated on the challenges they have to face due to their living conditions and how they try to manage their situation by shifting furniture around when it rains because of leaks in the roof. The participant indicated:

“...aye it is tough, when it is raining you have to move beds and shift other items, it is a four room with a lot of holes on the roof and even the wall, when its windy you can even hear the wind whistling, it is bad, it is leaking when it is raining, always.” (P4)

The finding that participants have a need for adequate shelter is referred to in literature that highlights that children in child-headed households do not have sufficient housing because they live in houses characterised by poor conditions, such as a leaking roof (Mogotlane et al., 2010:193-20; Phillips, 2011:140). It is clear that the participants go through life characterised by difficulties in almost every area, from unmet needs for food and clothes to inadequate housing. These children are confronted with multiple adversities as their material needs are left unsatisfied, making their existence a constant struggle. It is furthermore clear to see that the rights of these children to basic nutrition and shelter as referred to in section 28(1)(c) of the South African Constitution, are infringed upon (Republic of South Africa, 1996:13-17).

**(iv) Category: Need for further education**

The fourth category identified was that participants have a need for further education. Participants stated that they need to study further so that they could improve their lives. Participants mentioned:

*“...I need to study further, continue with education so that I can make something out of my life.”* (P1)

*“If I can get help to go to school, further my studies, that will be a good thing. I need help with education, furthering my studies, I just want to go to school.”* (P4)

It is clear from the above narratives that the participants were aware of the importance of education and of attending school, one of the participants specifically mentioned the importance of education and elaborated the desire to see family members furthering their studies. This participant said:

*“Education is important especially for my sister’s child as she is in grade 11 and I want her to study further.”*

Other participants mentioned a huge need to further their studies. One participant in particular added that being a header of the household would not be a deterrence as they were eager to further their education. Participants cited:

*“...for me I need to go to school so the parents of these children have to take them and live with them so that I can further my education, I need to study further.”* (P8)

*“...right now, I just want to finish school, a lot of people are assisting even with applying to the university, some of the teachers at school also know about our situation and they are helping.”* (P3)

The finding that headers of child-headed households have a need to further and complete their education is echoed in literature which indicates that children in child-headed households have a need to attend school, but that multiple responsibilities could result in them leaving school early (Collins et al., 2016:58-63). It can thus be stated that these children have a need to further their education, however because of their circumstances it is difficult for them to commit to their needs.

## **(b) Sub-theme: Need for employment (economic sustainability)**

The second sub-theme that was identified, was the need for employment (economic sustainability). Only one category was identified, namely the need for a stable income

### **(i) Category: *Need for a stable income***

The first and only category that emerged was the need for a stable income.

Participants said they needed employment in order to generate an income to take care of their siblings and to provide for their households. Participants cited:

“...well look, I would love to find a job so that I can provide for my family, the main thing is for me to work so that I can provide.” (P6)

“I just want a job; I want to be a taxi driver so that I can make money and provide in the house, but I also need to make a driving license.” (P10)

One of the participants mentioned they had small businesses of their own that they wanted to expand to generate money to cover their basic needs. This participant said:

“I need to create something that is mine, I am planning on expanding my business, I need money to start working on my plan and when my business is making enough money, I will be able to take care of myself and siblings.” (P12)

The participants saw themselves as the providers of the households, as their reasons for finding employment and a stable income were always related to being able to provide for the households. They did not mention that they would like to buy things for themselves. The finding that participants needed money or income matches the literature on income need in child-headed households stating that child-headed households' access to any income is often non-existent or insufficient (Blaauw et al., 2011:138-152; Hall et al., 2018:36).

It can thus be confirmed that headers of child-headed households and their siblings have a legitimate need for income as they are exposed to a variety of challenges that could be solved if they had the financial means. However, with them often not being acknowledged by society, their income needs remain unfulfilled and as a result they

are susceptible to exploitative labour practices. These labour practices violate their rights not to be required or permitted to perform work or provide services that are inappropriate for a person of that child's age, and place at risk the child's wellbeing, education, physical and/or mental health, or their spiritual, moral, or social development as set out in section 28(1)(f) of the South African Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996:13-17).

### **4.3.3 Experiences of headers of child-headed households regarding challenges**

The following section focus on the empirical research results regarding the experiences of child-headed household regarding challenges. Attention is given to the daily challenges of households, financial circumstances in child-headed households, school attendance of headers, and circumstances headers are exposed to.

#### **4.3.3.1 Daily challenges in the household**

With children in child-headed households going through life without adult caregivers, it is important to understand how they function on a daily basis. As a result, participants were asked to describe their daily challenges in the household. The sub-themes and categories identified within this theme are presented in Table 4.2

#### **(a) Sub-theme: Trying to survive without money**

The first sub-theme under the theme of daily challenges in the household, is related to the previous theme where participants indicated that the most important form of help was to give money to the household. In this sub-theme they elaborated on the challenges they experience in trying to survive without money. Two categories emerged from this subtheme.

##### **(i) Category: *Finding food to eat***

Participants indicated that finding food to eat was difficult, and that this difficulty was exacerbated by the fact that they could not do anything about the challenge, that they would see that other families had food to eat (i.e. at a friend's house), all the while knowing that they had nothing to eat. Participants cited:

*"...the challenge is food, food runs out, these are the challenges we face."* (P12)

“I can tell you that it is hard, very difficult, when there is no food, let me say when you are at your friend’s house and you see them eating and you do not even know what you are going to eat.” (P4)

Another participant revealed that, because of their inability to do something about the situation, they felt that there was something wrong with them for not being able to provide food. This participant said:

“In the house there is no food and there is nothing I can do about it and I am just sitting and then I ask myself, like what is wrong with me?” (P6)

One of the participants focused on the pressure the header of the household had to deal with in order to find food for the family. The participant went on to explain that when food ran out in their household, they were obliged to ask help from the neighbours, or to ask the shopkeeper for credit on the basic food items.

“...there is a lot of challenges, because sometimes even food runs out before month end and now, I have to go and ask around or go to the store and ask for credit.” (P11)

Another participant communicated that the family members would ask the neighbours or other family members to help out. This participant indicated:

“I was afraid of sleeping without adult caregivers, that was a challenge, I was scared, also when food runs out and electricity, food is a problem because we always have to ask at the neighbours or at our grandmother.” (P3)

The finding that headers of child-headed households often face challenges when food runs out and in finding food to eat, is echoed by Blaauw et al. (2011:138-144) who state that child-headed households often experience a lack of food as a result of living in severe poverty.

It can thus be confirmed that a lack of food is a huge challenge for headers, to such a degree that headers feel responsible for the situation and end up feeling inadequate because they were not able to put food on the table, or to make plans to obtain food. Looking at the participants’ narratives, it is clear that they were suffering, and although their rights are important in the domestic legal system, their reality is characterised by misery and hunger. Their basic rights to food are thus infringed upon.

**(ii) Category: *Unable to find employment***

The second category that surfaced was that the participants were unable to find employment, which again links to the previous theme about help that is needed. It is clear that participants were struggling to fulfill in the basic needs of their households and that their only concern was food and the need for employment to obtain money to buy food. Participants indicated that they were struggling to find employment which perpetuates their other challenges, such as buying food. Participants declared:

“...the biggest challenge is not having a job because you cannot do anything then about the challenges that need money. if I was working, I would be independent and be able to cover basic needs but that is not the case.” (P4)

“I am trying my best to find a piece job so that I can be able to help my family, but I am unable because there are no jobs, I just keep on looking hoping to find something.” (P1)

Other participants touched on the challenging aspects of being unemployed and mentioned the difficulty of watching other people going to work while they did not have the opportunity to do so. One participant mentioned:

“...the challenge is I wake up every day, I see people are going to work and I am sitting down not doing anything as I am unemployed.” (P6)

“...just need a job, however there are no jobs and that is a challenge.” (P10)

The above narratives focused on the responsibilities that headers had in providing for their households. These participants reflected on the difficulties they were experiencing as they had to solve problems, without having any income whilst knowing that there was nothing, they could do about it.

The finding that participants were unable to find employment, corresponds with literature declaring that headers of child-headed households faced many challenges, including being unemployed because of poor education and lack of skills (Mogotlane et al., 2010:24-30). It was also found that the headers were feeling responsible for their households and were struggling with their inability to provide for them. This situation adds to the already difficult role of headers, as these headers would be

prevented from being able to focus on their education, which could ultimately lead to them dropping out of school. Therefore, it is safe to state that the challenge of unemployment is inevitable for headers of child-headed households because they would often be forced out of schools in order to be parents to their siblings and would thus forego their employment.

#### **4.3.3.2 Financial challenges**

The fact that child-headed households often lived in poverty makes it important to gain an understanding of the way families support themselves financially. Therefore, participants were asked to explain how they were generating an income. The sub-themes and categories identified within this theme are presented in Table 4.2

##### **(a) Sub-theme: Unstable financial support from extended family**

The first sub-theme under the theme of financial circumstances in child-headed households is the unstable financial support that they receive from extended family. Two categories emerged from this sub-theme.

##### **(i) Category: *Unstable support from family members on a monthly basis***

The first category that emerged was unstable support from family members on a monthly basis. Some of the participants indicated that the only source of income they obtained was from their extended family, but it was clear that this source of income was not stable, as the amounts of money given on a monthly basis, were never the same. Participants mentioned:

“My aunt is one person who gives me money, she gives me R300 or R200 just to assist and that is how I am able to have money to cover basic items in the house.”

(P10)

“...my sister is one person who gives me money, there is an amount of money which she gives me, it is not the same amount every month, for example sometimes she gives me R1000 and sometimes R700, she does not give me the same amount every month.” (P8)

One of the participants mentioned that they had no source of income but that they could ask an uncle for money.



“...the only income I get is from my uncle, he provides us with most of what we need and also gives us money when we ask for it to cover what we need.” (P14)

The finding that participants are dependent on extended family members for income but that this support is often not stable, is confirmed by Mturi et al. (2012:54-56) who state that child-headed households normally receive irregular financial support from family members.

Another aspect to consider is that the irregular financial support that households receive often have the result that headers cannot plan or budget for the household on a monthly basis, this could then cause them to experience severe stress as they would never know how to provide for their households. The availability of food, for example, is linked to the amount of money allocated to child-headed households by family members. It can thus be said that extended families do support child-headed households, but that this support is inconsistent, making it impossible for the header to plan or budget.

**(ii) Category: *Irregular income from part-time jobs***

Another category that emerged was that headers of child-headed households received irregular incomes from part-time jobs as sources of financial support.

Some participants pointed out that they depended on part-time employment in order to generate some form of income. They explained that they normally engaged in part-time jobs, such as, cleaning the yards of people and making bricks, and that these jobs assisted them in obtaining some form of income. Participants mentioned:

“Yeah I do get piece jobs and make some money; I do piece jobs like cleaning people’s yards and with the money I get paid, I am able to cover what is needed in the house.” (P2)

“I get income from my part-time jobs, like I mentioned, cleaning people’s yards and making bricks sometimes and I am able to buy food in the house.” (P13)

One of the participants indicated that his part-time employment that provided some income, had been affected by the national lockdown due to Covid-19.

*“...well I am the person who plays keyboard at church and they normally give me R600 every month, but due to the lockdown, we stopped, so I am not getting anything.” (P12)*

The finding that participants generate irregular income as a result of engaging in part-time employment, corresponds with literature (Maqoko & Dreyer, 2008:717-731; Muyomi, 2012:193-207) that confirms that children from child-headed households partake in informal jobs in order to generate irregular income to satisfy their basic needs and those of their siblings. It can be seen that because participants have to care for their siblings, they end up working in low-income jobs to try and raise money in order to respond to their basic needs and to the needs of their siblings. Furthermore, it was found that it was only the headers (participants) who worked part time as the younger children were attending school.

**(b) Sub-theme: Insufficient income to buy food, electricity, and clothes**

The second sub-theme that came to the fore under the theme financial challenges in child-headed households is insufficient income to buy food, electricity, and clothes. Three categories emerged from this sub-theme.

**(i) Category: Basic expenses between R400 and R1500**

The first category under this sub-theme is that of basic expenses between R400 and R1500.

Some of the participants indicated that they spent most of their money on food, being a basic need. The participants added that they also had to use food money to purchase electricity. Participants cited:

*“...we spend R800 or R900 on food and electricity either R50 or R100.” (P10)*

*“I spend around R400 to R500 on food and R50 on electricity.” (P12)*

Some of the participants stated that they usually spend between R1050 and R1500 on food and electricity. They continued that food was expensive and for them to cover all necessary food items, they required more money. They went on to explain that the food they bought enable them to survive, however that come the middle of the month, they had to find a way to purchase more other food items. Participants indicated:

*“I spend R1500 on food and then electricity, that is not enough but we are able to survive, and some basic food items run out during the month and I have to make a plan, but we survive.” (P6)*

*“...so, we spend R1500 on food and R250 on electricity and we are able to survive a month, we do add some items during the middle of the month, but we are able to survive.” (P8)*

The finding that the headers of child-headed households usually spend between R400 and R1500 on basic expenses (food, electricity, and clothes) confirms that child-headed households were trying to respond to their basic needs with the limited amount of money they had. With the food and poverty line now calculated at R561 per person per month, child-headed households can be described as extremely poor due to them not earning nearly enough money. This situation is worsened by the fact that there are no alternative measures in place to assist child-headed households that has resulted in them believing that there was nothing they could do (Statistics South Africa, 2019:2-13).

**(ii) Category: Types of food bought**

The second category under this sub-theme is the types of food that child-headed households bought.

Some of the participants indicated that they buy the types of food which will be sufficient to last them a month. They went on to say that they would start with basic food items, such as maize meal, chicken, and vegetables, to avoid having to manage a situation where the little money they had did not cover what they needed.

*“I spend money on seshebo (meat, chicken) anything you can eat with pap “porridge”, buy 12.5kg maize meal and that lasts me for an extended period because it’s just me and the children.” (P7)*

*“We try to have maize meal, chicken, cabbage and other vegetables to ensure that we do not struggle that much and add few food items as time goes.” (P12)*

Other participants mentioned that the food they buy was dictated by the money they had. They added that they did not buy everything they needed; they only bought what they could afford. Participants cited:

“...food, I normally buy groceries at the beginning of the month and include seshebo (meat or chicken), maize meal, which is important, and other important items such as cabbages and potatoes with the little money we have. and with that we are able to survive a month.” (P4)

“...we buy important food items first because the money is not enough, the main item to buy is 25kg maize meal and add on other food items such vegetables, for example cabbage as well as some chicken.” (P15)

It can be seen that participants' food items were similar, although inadequate, as they only mentioned a few basic food items and explained the challenge of not having enough money to cover every basic food item they needed. The participants were aware that they did not have a guaranteed income, that they lived without caregivers, and that therefore the food they bought were motivated by survival and based on the participants' views. It is also clear that they bought food that could sustain them for an extended period and that there was almost no variety in their diet. This finding corresponds with literature that indicates that children in child-headed households understand what food they need, however, that the food they had in their households were insufficient (Van Breda, 2010:259-280).

### **(iii) Category: Lack of clothing**

The third category under this sub-theme is a lack of clothing.

Some of the participants indicated that they did not have enough clothes. They also mentioned that their clothes were bought seasonally by extended family members. Participants said the following:

“Well, when it comes to clothes, those are bought by my aunt, they just buy for us here and there, it's not something that happens every month.” (P2)

“We lack those, lack clothes, we do not easily buy clothes and we need them.” (P1)

“...for clothes, we take turns, let's say maybe uncle buy for my sister in January then in March, they will buy for me, I don't rush but my uncle makes sure that he settles everything well.” (P14)

Other participants mentioned that they did not buy clothes often because it was too expensive. They added that they did not have enough money to buy the clothes that they needed.

“I don't buy clothes every month, Yoh! clothes maybe twice a year, just buy two trousers and two tees, few jeans, you know how expensive boys' jeans are.” (P4)

“With clothes we do not buy them constantly, we buy them in the middle of the year, winter and then later in the year as we go to December, we layby and then pay off everything at a certain point.” (P6)

“I can say clothes are not really items that I will count because we do not buy them often.” (P12)

It is clear that clothes are not seen as a necessity and that the participants would often not buy clothes themselves, if they did, it would be once or twice a year, otherwise they depend on relatives to buy clothes for them. It is also clear that they do not consider clothing in their monthly budget. The finding that participants have a lack of clothing due to limited incomes is supported by South African literature which indicates that on a regular basis children in child-headed households do not have enough clothes (Mogotlane et al., 2010:19-20).

The difficulties that these participants were experiencing due to the fact that they had no income, strengthen the argument made earlier in this study, that child-headed households should have the same support as children in other forms of alternative care, such as foster care, by appointing community-based caregivers or adults which would make it possible for them to apply for a foster care grant. This is the case with Section 28(1)(b) that protects some children's right to parental and family care and provides alternative care when such care is lacking. However the same does not apply to child-headed households, as the state can make the decision to not place children in alternative care despite their challenges and without the support that foster children receive, thus leaving child-headed households vulnerable. Child-headed households

should at least receive the same support as children in foster care. Geldenhuys (2016:28) explains that in the case of child-headed households, the court may grant community-based caregivers permission to care for children in child-headed households, but for the foster care grant to be allocated to children in child-headed households, a report from a social worker has to accompany such applications.

#### **4.3.3.3 School attendance situation in household**

Children, in child-headed households, and especially the headers, are responsible for household chores. Performing these chores, could however influence their school attendance. Participants were therefore asked to describe what the situation was in their households concerning school attendance. The sub-themes and categories identified within this theme are presented in Table 4.2

##### **(a) Sub-theme: Siblings attend school**

The first sub-theme that was identified in the theme of the school attendance situation in the household is that the siblings of participants attended school.

##### **(i) Category: *Siblings attend primary and secondary school***

The first category under this sub-theme is that participants' siblings were attending primary and secondary school. The majority of the participants indicated that their siblings attend school and further described the different grades their siblings are in. Participants mentioned:

"...my youngest sister is in grade 6, while my other sister is doing grade 11." (P1)

"My younger brother is in matric, my two other siblings, one is in grade 6 and the other in grade 2." (P12)

"My sister goes to school and this year she is doing grade 11." (P14)

"...my younger sister is in grade 9 this year, she goes to the school in our village." (P10)

These findings clearly reflect that participants' siblings attend primary and secondary school. However, according to Collins et al. (2016:58-63), children in child-headed households' activities and the demands of the home, usually result in a high drop-out

rate from school. Yet, the study found that the majority of the participants' siblings attend school. This finding is therefore in contradiction with existing literature which points out that the school dropout rate is high in child-headed households.

**(b) Sub-theme: Header attends school or had completed school**

The second sub-theme under the theme of school attendance situation in household is that the header is in secondary school or had completed school

**(i) Category: Header in secondary school or had completed matric**

The first and only category under this sub-theme of header attending school is that participants are either in secondary school or have completed matric. The majority of the participants mentioned that they were still going to school and elaborated the importance of education and how completing school would have a positive impact on them and their siblings. Participants mentioned:

"I am still going to school, we just stopped now because of Covid but I am doing grade 12 and I am looking to finish so that I can further my studies and be something in life, I want to take care of my siblings and show them something positive." (P1)

"I am going to school, I do that alongside looking after my siblings and the house, it gets challenging, but I am going to school and I'm in grade 11, I want to finish school man." (P14)

Other participants pointed out that they completed their matric. They went on to clarify that completing their matric did not make their situation less challenging as they still face economic hardships due to unemployment. Participants cited:

"I completed my matric last year with a diploma, I still want to further my studies, that will be a good thing...find a job, save some money." (P4)

"I completed my matric in 2017...I can continue hustling instead of furthering my studies because for me now furthering my studies might still not guarantee me a job and that will not be that beneficial on my side" (P12)

The finding that some participants were in secondary school while others had completed their schooling, contradicts literature that stated how the importance of

education is overlooked by children in child-headed households causing them to often not complete school and to ultimately drop out of school (Pillay, 2016:1-8).

The study also found that headers of child-headed households understood the importance of attending school and were determined to continue with their education. In fact, some have managed to complete their matric, regardless of the challenges they were exposed to in their households. It can thus be said that the headers of child-headed households do not overlook the importance of education, despite difficult circumstances.

### **(c) Sub-theme: Header dropped out of school**

The third sub-theme under the theme, school attendance situation in household is that a few participants dropped out of school. One category emerged from this sub-theme, namely that it was difficult to finish school.

#### **(i) Category: *Difficulty to finish school***

A few participants indicated that they dropped out of school. They added that the reason they dropped out of school was because they found it difficult to focus on their schoolwork. Participants explained that repeating grades made it difficult for them to continue with school, hence they decided to leave school. Participants cited:

*"I dropped out of grade 11 after failing. I wanted to leave school and get a job so that I can make money, and at that time it made sense for me to drop out."* (P11)

Another participant indicated that a failed matriculation exam was due to the pressure to have part-time jobs to take care of the family.

*"I failed my matric and dropped out, I also wanted to continue with education but I could not and then I just tried to at least finish matric, which is something that I could also not do because of trying to survive by getting part-time jobs in order to take care of the family."* (P6)

The narratives again allude to the fact that the responsibility of taking care of the household lies heavily on the participants. The finding therefore is that participants had difficulty finishing school due to the pressure of failing their grades, as well as the responsibility of having to care for their siblings. Nziyane and Alpaslan (2012:290-305)



agree that taking over parental duties affects headers of child-headed households' lives in that, amongst other things, it interferes with the headers' schooling and could contribute to the header dropping out of school. It can thus be concluded that participants are exposed to circumstances that makes it difficult for them to finish school, and while some of them can be resilient through the hardships and continue with their schooling until they complete, others succumb under pressure, fail their grades and ultimately leave school.

#### **4.3.3.4 Experiences of headers as head of household**

The headers of these child-headed households are children who have to assume parental responsibilities that exposes them to a variety of difficulties. Therefore, participants were asked to describe the circumstances they are exposed to as headers of their households. The sub-themes and categories identified within this theme are presented in Table 4.2

##### **(a) Sub-theme: Lack of adult or parental guidance and care**

The first sub-theme is a lack of parental guidance. One category emerged from this sub-theme.

##### **(i) Category: *Absence of parents***

The first category under this sub-theme is the absence of parents. Some of the participants stated that it was extremely difficult not to have adult guidance and care as the absence thereof catapulted them into adulthood and denied them their sense of childhood. Participants further explained that dividing their time between school and household chores made their experience as headers of child-headed households difficult and challenging. One thing they recognised to be the main challenge was lack of adult care. Participants mentioned:

"...eish , truly speaking it is hard, on this side you have school work that you have to do, on that side you have to cook for the family to eat, on this other side you have to bath the child, it is hard. No, what can I say? It is tough but it is life, life goes on... there was a point whereby my uncle was around, he was working but he never bought food for us, he did not care for us and that was hard." (P2)

“...well living without parents of course is not good, it is hard but because we do not have parents, we just accept that but according to me, it is not fine.” (P10)

Other participants indicated that the lack of adult or parental guidance and care made their lives difficult because it denied them the opportunity and freedom to be young and enjoy their life. Participants mentioned:

“It is difficult, because first of all I am still a child I am unable to do what my friends are doing, like what my age mates are doing, going up and down, being free and playful, I already I have a house I need to take care of.” (P6)

“Yeah, I used to envy my friends when they were doing what they want, being free and I had to look after the children, that was hard but I got used to the situation, sometimes I feel lonely.” (P8)

“It is too much, I also need fresh air, because now I cannot visit my friends or my partner, I am always indoors, looking after the children, do you understand, I do not have the time whereby maybe I get some air.” (P11)

Looking at the participants' views, it is clear that they have been compromised. It can thus be stated that the lack of adult or parental guidance and care affects participants and their siblings negatively as they are unable to experience positive relational exchanges with parents or adult caregivers. They were also unable to experience life like other children who grew up with the care, love, and support of their parents or adult caregivers. The finding that participants lacked parental or adult guidance and care, corresponds with literature put forth by Alpaslan and Nziyane, (2011:117-136) and Muyomi, (2012:193-207) who wrote that child-headed households living by themselves or with siblings, have difficult circumstances because they are deprived of parental or adult care.

It was also found that participants were aware of the fact that their situation was not normal and that they were experiencing feelings of loss because they could not be free to be a child without the responsibility to care for a household.

## **(b) Sub-theme: Education influenced by household responsibility**

The second sub-theme is education influenced by household responsibility. One category emerged from this sub-theme.

### **(i) Category: *Taking care of the children made it impossible to attend school and extra classes***

The category under the second sub-theme is that taking care of the children made it impossible to attend school and extra classes. Participants cited that they performed poorly at school due to the difficult and challenging experiences they went through as headers of child-headed households. They explained the difficulty of having to execute house chores and schoolwork, as well as looking after the children without assistance. Participants mentioned:

*"I had to look after the children, that was hard but I got used to the situation, there was a point whereby I could not attend Saturday studies or afternoon studies week days when I was going to school because I needed to care for the children, that was hard."*  
(P8)

*"It is challenging because some of the school activities, you do not do them well because you are thinking about household chores while at school."* (P13)

One of the participants indicated that they performed poorly at school after they lost a parent. The participant explained that they suddenly had to look after their siblings and the house while they also had to focus on school. This caused the participant to succumb to the pressure to a certain extent.

*"I had a challenge with my education because I started slacking, you know that feeling of losing a parent, not having a parent and having to look after your siblings straight away, on the other side you have school, I lost focus on my books and so I failed the grade."* (P14)

The finding that participants taking care of the children made it impossible to attend school and extra classes, corresponds with Collins et al. (2016:58-63) who were of the opinion that the education of headers of child-headed is affected when they have to take time to run their households and look after their siblings, instead of completing

and keeping up with their schoolwork. It is understandable that completing school became difficult for participants because they had to divide their attention between multiple demanding activities, at school and at home. These headers were furthermore also worried about how they were going to provide for their households, thus also influencing their impact and ability to focus on schoolwork which ultimately infringes upon their right to a basic education and further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible (Republic of South Africa, 1996:14)

#### **4.3.4 Social services needed**

In this section the social services needed by child-headed households from the perspective of the headers of the households, are explored. There is a focus on types of services received or receiving, awareness about services that should be rendered, the rights of a header of child-headed household, and the important needs of the header of a child-header household.

##### **4.3.4.1 Service rendering to household**

Section 150(2) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (Republic of South Africa, 2005) states that a child-headed household must be referred to a designated social worker who must investigate if children in such circumstances are in need of care and protection. If they were not found to be in need of care and protection, the social worker should provide appropriate support services. Therefore, participants were asked to describe the type of services they had received or are receiving from social workers. The sub-themes and categories identified within this theme are presented in Table 4.2

##### **(a) Sub-theme: Lack of social services**

The first sub-theme under the theme, types of services received or receiving is a lack of social services. One category emerged from this sub-theme

##### **(i) Category: *Lack of social work services***

The first category that emerged, was that most of the participants had a lack of social services from social workers. Many participants indicated that they had approached available social workers and that they were looking for assistance, however they had not been assisted in any way. The participants went on to explain that they reached a

point where they completely stopped going to social workers because they were not assisted and because it was frustrating. Participants cited:

“I have been going to social workers looking for assistance, however they did not help, they made me fill in form after form without providing concrete assistance and I decided to stop going to them because they could not help me.” (P11)

“I have not received anything from any social workers.” (P3)

“No one came ever since I started living alone.” (P19)

“No, I have not seen any social worker or met one ever since I started living by myself.” (P17)

Other participants mentioned that they did not obtain any social work services and they continued to explain that they have not seen any social worker coming to their house since they commenced being headers of the household.

“we did not receive any services from social workers, we have not seen any social worker coming to our house, no one” (P2)

“nothing, we have not received any services, there was no point that I came across a social worker who came to our house to try and assist us” (P6)

The fact that social workers did not provide assistance to these child-headed households is in violation of section 150(2) of the Children’s Act 38 of 2005 that provides that a designated social worker must first investigate the child’s circumstances and if found that the children are not in need of care and protection, the social worker should, where necessary, provide appropriate support and services without removing the children from the existing placement of care (Republic of South Africa, 2005:63-64). This means that the social workers who were approached by the participants, did not assess the situation of the child-headed households and did not offer any of the abovementioned support services. The children of the child-headed households were thus not regarded as children in need of care and protection as stipulated in the Children’s Act (38 of 2005).

## **(b) Sub-theme: Lack of social security**

The second sub-theme under the theme, types of services received or receiving, is a lack of social security. One category emerged from this sub-theme

### **(i) Category: *Challenging to access social grants***

The first and only category that emerged from the sub-theme was that participants found it challenging to obtain access to social grants. Participants indicated that the application process was prolonged, and that no feedback was provided on the outcome of the application. Participants further stated that the social workers they visited were not as helpful as they had hoped. This made accessing social grants even more difficult to a point where the participants surrendered the process of applying for social grants. Participants cited:

“No one assisted, no social worker, I even went to their office to go and try to apply for a grant telling them that my mother died however no one came to assist me, they just dragged the matter until the family told me to leave it.” (P7)

“...like from all the things I tried, being sent all around, there is a social worker in another location, I went there to try and apply for money given to orphans, they asked me the same questions every time I went there and they did not provide any assistance. Even today nothing happened, I went there almost every day, at a certain time the social worker is there, another day he is not there.” (P11)

The finding that participants found it challenging to access social grants because of unhelpful social workers and because of the prolonged social grant application processes, amongst other challenges, is echoed by literature. Hall (2018:22) states that a variety of reasons, such as the unavailability of birth certificates and extended application processes, contribute to child-headed households' failure to access or sufficiently benefit from social grants.

Section 150(2) of the Children's Act state that children of child-headed households may be in need of care and protection, thus leaving room for the interpretation and consideration of whether these children actually do need to be taken care of, even though they have been living without adult care or supervision, and though they struggle to access social grants. However, it is obvious that these children are in need

of care and protection and that they do not have access to any grants. For example, children who are removed from their parents, have access to the foster care grant and are placed with foster parents. The Children's Amendment Act (Act 41 of 2007 ) further confirms that a child-headed household must function under the general supervision of an adult, who would then be able to apply for social security. Yet, in practice this is not the case because these children from the child-headed households in this study group go through life without adult caregivers and also without any financial assistance from the State. It seems as if the possible options as indicated in legislation (Children's act, 38 of 2005 and the Children's Amendment Act (41 of 2007) are not considered or executed in practice.

### **(c) Sub-theme: Awareness about services that should be rendered**

The third sub-theme under the theme, types of services received or receiving, is awareness about services that should be rendered. One category emerged from this sub-theme.

#### **(i) Category: *Limited knowledge about social work services***

The first and only category that emerged from the sub-theme was that participants have limited knowledge about social work services. The majority of the participants indicated that they had limited knowledge about services that could be rendered to them. They continued that they did not know about any services that should have been rendered to them. In fact, many of the participants indicated that they had not encountered any social workers who provided any assistance since they became headers of the households. Participants mentioned:

"...there I would be lying to you; I do not know anything; I am not aware of services because I have not seen any services or encountered a social worker anywhere." (P2)

"No, I am not aware of any services" (P8)

Other participants indicated that they did not have social workers in their area, and that they would only hear through other people of a social worker at the clinic. They added that they were also not aware of the services the social worker could offer them. The stated as follows:

“No, I am not aware of any services, I only know that there is a social worker in the area, but we never searched for any information on what the social worker can do for us” (P4)

“...no, I am not aware, I have not seen anyone coming here at home to try and help us.” (P7)

The finding that participants have limited knowledge about social services is in line with Dutschke and Monson (2008:25-26) who state that families and children do not know enough about social services and they are confused as to where they can obtain these services. The challenges that participants cited with regards to their limited knowledge about social services correspond with what literature indicates. Furthermore, according to Section 150(2) these children must be referred to a designated child protection worker to execute an investigation. It seems as if communities are also not knowledgeable about the procedures to be followed when children are living in child-headed households.

#### **4.3.4.2 Rights as a header of child-headed household**

The South African Constitution promises certain rights such as a right to adequate shelter and nutrition. Participants were thus asked to describe their rights as headers of child-headed households. The sub-themes and categories identified within this theme are presented in Table 4.2

##### **(a) Sub-theme: Limited knowledge about rights as a header**

The first sub-theme under the theme of rights as a header of child-headed household is limited knowledge about their rights as a header. One category emerged from this sub-theme.

##### **(i) Category: No awareness of rights, acceptance of circumstances**

The first and only category under this sub-theme is no awareness of rights, and the acceptance of circumstances. Many participants indicated that they were not aware of their rights as headers of child-headed households. They further explained that being headers of their households were all they knew, and they have accepted their role and their circumstances, therefore they did not know about any rights. Participants cited:



“...my rights? Eish because things are just the way they were when my grandmother was still alive. We were just living like this. I have always done what I am doing, which is taking care of my siblings and grandma now my mother, to be honest, I do not know, things are just the way they have always been. We have always lived like this.” (P2)

“What can I say brother, I do not know.” (P12)

One of the participants indicated that they had been looking after each other since they were left on their own. The participants went on to explain that their situation was tough, but that it was reality and that they knew they could not run away from it, therefore it does not help them to feel sorry for themselves or think about their rights.

“...me, ah, everything is fine, we just look after each other, there is nothing else we can do but with rights...ah it is not something that is on my mind.” (P10)

The finding that participants had no realisation of their rights because of their limited knowledge, corresponds with literature of Mogotlane et al. (2010:24-30) who found that these children are often not aware of what their rights were. It can thus be concluded that the lack of knowledge of children about their rights is the reason why they do not speak out about their needs. Furthermore, they are not presented with an alternative, leaving them to accept their situation as one with no hope for a change in circumstances. These children need advocacy to make relevant role players aware of the injustices in terms of the lack of support that they experience. Their rights are compromised as they go through life, having lost the traditional family environment, and with no official consistent financial support from the government to help them care for themselves. This is not in line with section 28 of the Constitution of South Africa which states that every child has the right to family care or parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment (Republic of South Africa, 1996:13-14). It can be concluded that section 28 of the South African Constitution is not applicable to children living in child-headed households in this study group.

#### **4.3.4.3 Important needs**

In order to deliver social services, one must first gain knowledge about the most important needs of children in child-headed households. Participants were accordingly

asked to describe their three most important needs. The sub-themes and categories identified within this theme are presented in Table 4.2

**(a) Sub-theme: Three type of material needs**

The first sub-theme under the theme of important needs is three types of material needs. One category emerged from this sub-theme.

**(i) Category: *food, clothes, shelter***

The first and only category under this sub-theme includes the three most important needs of participants, namely food, clothes, and shelter. The majority of participants indicated three most important needs, including food, clothes, and shelter. Food, clothes, and shelter were cited as the most important of the material needs because participants mentioned that these were what they needed the most. Participants mentioned:

*“...well, if we can just have food and school clothes, we will be fine, well if I can add, also the house is not in good condition, like I said when there is wind, it is total danger, yeses!” (P2)*

*“I can start by saying food, clothes, even a house because where we stay is not good.” (P11)*

The finding that food, clothes, and shelter are the three most important needs for child-headed households, is in synch with various literature sources that indicate that children in child-headed households have material needs such as food, adequate clothing, and shelter, due to their circumstances (Phillips, 2011:140; Maqoko & Dreyer, 2008:711-731; Mogotlane et al., 2010:24-30). As the majority of participants listed food, clothing, and shelter as their ultimate basic needs in these households, it becomes clear that these needs are of paramount importance and should be effectively satisfied by implementing section 28 of the South African Constitution which states that every child has the right to basic nutrition and shelter. This is also one of the fundamentals off the United Nations Convention of the Child, which concurs that human rights may be the most effective way to reduce or eradicate injustice while advancing human dignity and welfare (Republic of South Africa, 1996:13-14 ;UNICEF, 2009:9).

#### 4.3.4.4 Additional information

Children in child-headed households need a voice to express their needs and challenges. They need a platform to articulate how they should be treated and what should happen to them. As a result, participants were asked to provide any additional information or ask any questions they think would be necessary to contribute to the discussion. The participants appreciated that they could speak to someone who showed interest and wanted to understand their predicament, and who was willing to raise awareness about their experiences and needs. Participants mentioned:

*“I want to say thank you for the opportunity, it was not easy to speak but I managed, thank you.”* (P1)

*“No, nothing at all, everything is okay, thank you, thank you for calling and listening.”* (P4)

Other participants indicated that they did not have any questions and that they did not want to add anything else. These participants also mentioned that they were happy with the way the interviews went.

*“No, there is nothing I want to add, everything went well.”* (P8)

*“No, I think I have said what I wanted to say, it is all fine.”* (P6)

The above findings indicate that the participants were satisfied that they could share their experiences and could talk to someone who was willing to listen. The findings further show that the participants thoroughly engaged in the interviews and shared their experiences with the researcher. The principles that children should have the right to talk and be listened to, especially when decisions are made that could affect them in any way, are echoed in the Bill of Rights and in literature (Petrén & Hart, 2000:43; South African Human Rights Commission, 2011:58). However, children in child-headed households live by themselves and do not necessarily have the opportunity to communicate to adult caregivers.

It can thus be concluded that children in child-headed households should be given the opportunity to explore and describe their challenges, and to address their needs. These children need opportunities to tell their stories, to learn, to develop, and to grow in order to become the best version of themselves as the circumstances they find

themselves in has the potential to distract them before they could become what they were intended to be.

#### **4.4 CONCLUSION**

This chapter contains the empirical data of headers of child-headed households and reflect the views and the experiences of these headers. The identifying details of all participants were described, as well as their perceptions on the nature of child-headed households, their daily responsibilities as headers of their households, and their financial circumstances. Participants further described the circumstances they were exposed to and the type of services they received or were receiving. It was found that headers of child-headed households are exposed to a variety of challenges such as a lack of parental care, a lack of food, and a lack of social work services. Their challenges are increased by the fact that they do not have adult caregivers and go through life alone or with their siblings. Their rights as indicated in Section 28 of the Constitution are compromised (Republic of South Africa, 1996:14-17). The final study objective will be addressed in the Chapter 5, which will examine the conclusions and recommendations of the researcher.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This study aimed to explore the experiences of headers of child-headed households in the Greater Sekhukhune District of the Limpopo Province. This was achieved through implementing four research objectives.

The first objective of this study was met in Chapter 2, where policy and legislation pertaining to child-headed households in the South African context was explored and described from a rights-based perspective. The second objective of this study was addressed in Chapter 3, which described the needs and challenges of child-headed households and the social services that these households require. Chapter 4 aimed to achieve the study's third objective by exhibiting the empirical investigation of the experiences of headers of child-headed households and the services rendered to them by service providers in the Greater Sekhukhune District of the Limpopo Province.

The purpose of this final chapter is to meet the fourth objective of the study by presenting conclusions from the study and making recommendations.

#### **5.2 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON EMPIRICAL FINDINGS**

The conclusions and recommendations explored in this chapter are based on findings of the empirical investigation and are presented in a similar format to that of Chapter 4. The order will therefore follow that of the semi-structured interview schedule.

##### **5.2.1 Profile of the participants**

The investigations in this section focused on the participants' number of years as headers of households, their gender, current age, their age when they became headers, and their occupation. Research was also done regarding the number of siblings that were living in these households as well as their ages.

The identifying details of the participants revealed that the majority participants had been headers of child-headed households for five years while the minority of the participants had been headers for an average of two years. Fewer participants had

been headers of their households for three years, while four participants had been headers of child-headed households for six years. Regarding the gender of the participants, it was found that there were more male headers than female headers. A criteria for inclusion in the sample of the study was that the header of the child-headed household must be between the ages of 19 and 22 years and have been caring and looking after the children in the household from when the header was under the age of 18 years. Thus, all the participants were between the ages of 19 and 22. Few of the participants were between the ages of 19 and 20 years, 11 participants became headers of their households when they were 17 years old, 5 of the participants became headers of their households when they were 16 years old, and 3 participants became headers of households at the age of 15 years.

The majority of the participants were attending secondary school. When it came to being employed, most of the participants were unemployed, while some of the participants had jobs. Concerning the number of siblings that lived in the households, most of the participants headed households with one sibling. A minority of participants headed households with two siblings and only a few participants headed households with three siblings.

Finally, with regards to the age of the siblings that lived in the household, most of the participants indicated that their siblings were between the ages of 14 and 19 years. A minority of the participants had siblings between the ages of 9 and 13 years. Furthermore, a few participants indicated that their siblings were between the ages of 1 to 8 years. In addition, 4 participants emerged who were living alone without siblings. They were included in the study because they regarded themselves as headers of child-headed households. They were between the ages of 19 and 22 and have been looking after themselves since they were under the age of 18 years. They had similar experiences to headers who looked after their siblings and provided the perspective that not all headers of child-headed households were living with siblings.

## CONCLUSIONS

It was concluded that:

- Most participants had been headers of child-headed households for five years indicating that they had sufficient knowledge as headers and had sufficient experience to articulate their needs and challenges.
- Most of the participants were males leaving a minority of female headers.
- Many of the participants were between the ages of 20 and 22 years. The criteria for participation was, inter alia, that the participants should have been caring and looking after children in households from when the headers were under the age of 18 years (between the ages of 15 and 17 years), therefore, the figures show that the particular headers of child-headed households occupied their roles from when they were adolescents and kept on doing so until they were young adults.
- Some participants who were living on their own also identified themselves as being part of only child-headed households.
- Participants who live on their own without siblings must also be regarded as headers of child-headed households as they were between the ages of 19 and 22 and have been looking after themselves since they were under the age of 18 years. They had similar experiences to headers who looked after their siblings. However, their experiences were extended by the fact that they were living totally on their own without caregivers or siblings, clearly providing an important perspective that not all headers of child-headed households were living with siblings. The definition for child headed households should therefore include only child households.
- Most of the participants indicated that they were attending school.
- Most participants stated that they became headers of their households when they were 17 years old and a few participants started to take care of their households when they were 15 years old.
- Most participants indicated that they lived in households with one sibling, indicating that they were not only taking care of themselves, but were also responsible for the care and support of other children.

- Most participants indicated that the majority of their siblings were between the ages of 14 and 19 years old, indicating that some of the participants were nearly the same ages as those they had to care for and support.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **It is recommended that:**

- An adult caregiver be made available to provide parental care and supervision for headers of child-headed households and their siblings.
- Social workers must promote services available to headers of child-headed households, as well as the procedures to be followed in acquiring them.

### **5.2.2 Nature of child-headed households**

The investigation in this section focused on the nature of child-headed households.

#### **5.2.2.1 Theme 1: Circumstances that caused the header to become the head of the household**

Most of the participants indicated that their mothers had died and that their fathers were not living with them, had no relationship with them and did not support them. Some of the participants indicated that both their parents had died and that they used to live with other family members, such as grandparents and aunts. However, they were not staying with these family members as they had also died and ended up living alone with their siblings. Apart from a few participants who stated that both their parents had died, other participants indicated that either their mother or father was ill and that they were responsible to care for the parents and households alongside their siblings. Lastly a few participants indicated that that their mothers were working away from home and as a result were absent from their households leaving the headers to be in charge.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

It can be concluded that headers of child-headed households found themselves in difficult circumstances as a result of unfortunate life events, such as the death of their mothers, a non-existent relationship with their fathers, migration work of the mothers, and the death of other family members. These headers of child-headed households ended up living alone with their siblings, without any adult supervision or support and



in direct violation of their right to family care or parental care as indicated in section 28 of the South African Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Together these difficult circumstances exposed the headers of child-headed households to multiple challenges, such as having to go through life without adult caregivers thereby being forced into adulthood.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **It is recommended that:**

- The rights of children in child-headed households to family care or parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment, should be promoted, and protected.
- All child-headed households should be referred to child protection social workers and investigated in terms of the provisions of section 150(2) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005, to determine if they are in need of care and protection.

### **5.2.2.2 Theme 2: Time immediately after being left without parents**

It was found that in the time immediately after being left without parents the headers of child-headed households assumed the responsibilities of an adult or caregiver by providing care and support to their siblings. Some of the participants indicated that they did not only have to provide care and support to their siblings but that they also had to look for part-time employment in order to make some money and provide for their siblings. Lastly a few other participants mentioned that they had to seek assistance from their neighbours and relatives in the form of money and food in the time immediately after they were left without parents.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

It can be concluded that the time immediately after being left without parents was the most difficult for headers of child-headed households as they had to provide support and care for their siblings because they had to assume the responsibilities of an adult or caregiver. Headers of child-headed households also had to look for part-time employment in order to earn some money and to survive with their siblings in the absence of their parents. Furthermore, the headers of child-headed households had

to seek assistance in terms of money and food from their relatives, neighbours, and friends in order to respond not only to their basic needs but also to the needs of their siblings.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **It is recommended that:**

- Even if a social worker found that children of child-headed households were not in need of care and protection in terms of the provisions in the Children's Act, support services should nevertheless be delivered to them.
- Social security should be made available to children in child-headed households to ensure their rights to basic nutrition.
- Decision makers, and law and policy makers should consider the impact that child-headed households have on the lives of children when considering if such an arrangement is in the best interests of a child.

### **5.2.2.3 Theme 3: Daily responsibilities in the household and assistance from outside**

It was found that most of the participants were responsible for domestic chores, such as cleaning and cooking. The participants added that they shared the responsibilities in the household with their siblings. Some participants indicated that by taking on the role of an adult, they were forced to become parents while they were still young. They continued that even though they assumed the responsibilities of an adult they found it difficult to perform as such. The headers of child-headed households further mentioned that they had to care for their siblings and cook and clean. In terms of assistance the majority of the participants indicated that they had friends who assisted them in performing their daily responsibilities. The participants further mentioned that the assistance they received made a difference as they were able to get things done, such as to attend school parent meetings while their friends looked after their siblings.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Section 20(1) of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) (1990:9) points out that parents or other persons responsible for the child shall have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child and shall

have the duty to ensure that the best interests of the child are always their basic concern. However, in the case of headers of child-headed households and their siblings, these young headers were responsible for domestic chores in their households and for emotional support to themselves and their siblings. These children were expected to replace their parents, something that was very difficult for them. It is clear that these headers of child-headed households had daily responsibilities which were way above their developmental age and abilities and that they tried to execute these roles because they had no alternatives.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **It is recommended that**

- The stipulations of the Children's Amendment Act 41 of 2007 should be implemented in such a way that a child-headed household must function under the general supervision of an adult appointed by a children's court, or an organ of the state, or an NGO determined by the provincial head of social development.
- Provincial Departments of Social Development should ensure that social workers have a thorough understanding of the execution of the Children's Act 38 of 2005, as amended by the Amendment Act 41 of 2007 to uphold the rights of children in child-headed households as indicated in section 28 of the Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996:13-17).
- Child-headed households should be supported to work through their feelings of loss after they were left alone.

### **5.2.2.4 Theme 4 : Help that would improve everyday life**

All participants agreed that the fulfilment of their material needs would improve their everyday life. The one material need mentioned by all the participants was the need for food. All participants indicated that help with food would greatly improve their everyday life. Some participants indicated that there was a material need for clothes while others mentioned the need for adequate shelter as they indicated that they were living in dilapidated structures. The need for further education was also indicated by some of the participants, whilst others indicated that they needed employment in order to generate income.

## CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded that most of the participants would have liked for their material needs, such as food, clothes, adequate shelter, and further education, to be fulfilled. It was also concluded that headers of child-headed households were going alone through life and as a result had legitimate needs that had to be fulfilled. Apart from that, the participants also had the need to be employed in order to earn stable incomes, which would in turn have given them ways and means to fulfil their material needs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**It is recommended that:**

- Social workers should, where necessary, take measures to assist headers of child-headed households with counselling, mediation, prevention and early intervention services, family reconstruction and rehabilitation, behaviour modification, problem solving and referral to another suitably qualified person or organisation as indicated in legislation
- A social security option should be made available to children in child-headed households, or measures should be put in place to enable these households to have access to social grants to fulfil their basic needs.

### 5.2.3 Experiences of headers of child-headed households regarding challenges

In this section the experiences of child-headed households in terms of the challenges they face, are discussed.

#### 5.2.3. Theme 5: Daily challenges in the household

It was found that the main daily challenge that headers of child-headed households faced was trying to survive without money. Headers indicated the challenge they faced of trying to survive without money and how having no money made it difficult for them to find food. They conveyed how food would run out in the middle of the month and how they could do nothing about it. The participants continued that they were sometimes obliged to ask for credit at stores in order to purchase basic food items. Another daily challenge for the participants was to find employment. Participants indicated that not having a job meant they were unable to do anything about their

challenges. They also added that they were trying their best to find employment so that they could care for their families.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

It can thus be concluded that headers of child-headed households faced many different challenges in their households on a daily basis. These challenges ranged from struggling to find food, to being unable to find employment. Headers of child-headed households are thus exposed to two of the most difficult challenges, namely the difficulty to find food, as well as being unemployed. The fact that headers of child-headed households find it difficult to find food, directly violates their right to basic nutrition and is not in line with section 28 of the South African Constitution.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

### **It is recommended that**

- Headers of child-headed households should be assisted to access social security in order for them to be able to care for themselves and their households.

### **5.2.3.2 Theme 6: Financial challenges**

Most of the participants indicated that they received financial assistance from their families but added that this was irregular. They mentioned that the amounts of money they received fluctuated each month. To supplement this irregular insufficient income, some of the participants stated that they generated irregular income from part-time jobs in order to immediately satisfy the basic needs of their siblings. Some of the participants indicated that their income was insufficient to buy food, clothes, and electricity, which made them spend less money on basic food items and electricity. Few other participants indicated that because they had little funds, they could only buy limited food supplies. A minority of the participants indicated that having little money meant that they would spend it on basic foodstuff and not on clothes, and if they did buy clothes it would be once or twice a year.

## CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded that extended families played a significant role in financially supporting child-headed households even if the amounts they provided were irregular. For some child-headed households this was often the only income they could obtain. This unstable monthly income from extended families would often be the reason some of the participants wanted to engage in part-time employment as they could then generate an irregular income. It is also clear that the insufficient income that they must buy food, electricity, and clothes with had led participants to be in “survival” mode. Once again this is not in line with section 28 of the South African Constitution.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### It is recommended that:

- Headers of child-headed should have access to social security grants instead of having to rely on donations of extended family members, because they have to manage their finances to care for their households and because security grants would give them a stable income and would enable them to plan accordingly.
- The stipulations as indicated in applicable legislation (Children’s Act 38 of 2005, and the Children’s Amendment Act 41 of 2007) should be executed as this would entail an investigation in terms of section 150(2) of the Children’s Act and the possible appointment of a supervising adult to assist child-headed households with the application for a social security grant, which could ensure a stable income to the child-headed households.

### 5.2.3.3 Theme 7: School attendance situation in household

All the participants indicated that their siblings had been attending either primary or secondary schools and that they themselves had been attending secondary school. Some participants noted that they had completed their grade 12. The participants who stated that they had been attending school, explained that it was difficult to take care of their siblings and still focus on schoolwork, however regardless of these difficulties they still had been motivated to finish school and acquire skills. The participants who had finished school explained the difficulty of not finding a job and elaborated that

finishing school did not help them find jobs. A few of the participants indicated that they had to drop out of school as it became too difficult to finish school and as they were already repeating grades which was not beneficial to them.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

It can be concluded that the siblings of participants understood the importance of education as, regardless of the challenges they were exposed to, they were still committed to continue with their schooling. It is also clear that many participants attended school themselves, while some managed to complete their matric. This means that apart from running their households, headers could also continue attending school which is a clear indication that they were determined to complete school despite their challenges. However, while some participants continued with their schooling, others had to drop out of school because they could not manage to care for their siblings and continue to attend school.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**It is recommended that:**

- Section 28 of the South African Constitution be implemented effectively to ensure everyone, including children of child-headed households, has the opportunity to basic education.
- Social workers should effectively deliver support services to children of child-headed households in terms of section 150(3) of the Children's Act which states that measures should be taken to assist children, including prevention and early intervention services, in executing their right to education.
- Awareness programmes should be developed to educate teachers in schools about the possible services that should be rendered to child-headed households

### **5.2.3.5 Theme 8: Experiences of headers as heads of households**

The main experience that participants encountered as headers of child-headed households was the lack of adult or parental guidance and care due to the absence of their parents. They experienced this lack of guidance because they were deprived of parental and adult care yet had to take on the responsibility of their households and

siblings. Having no parents and lacking adult care and guidance also affected the school performance of headers of child-headed households. Some of the participants indicated that their education was influenced by their household responsibilities and clarified that taking care of their siblings made it impossible for them to attend school and extra classes.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

It can be concluded that due to a lack of adult care and poor school performance, it could be extremely challenging for participants to have positive experiences whereby their wellbeing is improved. It is important that the rights of headers of child-headed households should be protected and that they should also have stable caregivers in order to support the psychological and social capacities of headers of child-headed households.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **It is recommended that:**

- Adult or community-based caregivers should be appointed to provide parental guidance and care for headers of child-headed households and their siblings as indicated in legislation. This would enable the headers to focus on their education and to reduce role overload.
- The Department of Social Development should collaborate with the Department of Education to raise awareness of the plight of child-headed households and to encourage schools to report the existence of child-headed households to social services. This would enable social workers to investigate the need for care and protection and to deliver support services in line with section 150(2) of the Children's Act of 2005.

### **5.2.4 Social services needed**

This section focused on the social services that child-headed households required.

#### **5.2.4.1 Theme 9: Service rendering to household**

The majority of participants indicated that they lacked social services. They added that no social workers had been to their households to investigate their situation. Some of



the participants indicated that they had no social security and that their access to social grants was limited. The minority of participants mentioned that social workers who were supposed to help them acquire social grants, did not assist them. This often caused them to give up trying to acquire social grants because their requests and applications were never addressed. Moreover, the majority of the participants indicated that they were not aware of the services that could be rendered to them. The minority of the participants added that they had not been in contact with any social workers in their respective villages and did not know what social workers could do to assist them in their predicament. A few of the participants indicated that there were not enough social workers in their geographical area and consequently they had never been serviced by social workers.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

It can be concluded that social workers did not investigate cases where children were left in charge of households and that this was not in compliance with the provisions of the Children's Act (38 of 2005) that determines that a social worker should first investigate and provide appropriate support and services without removing the child from the existing placement of care. This way headers of child-headed households would receive assistance through the provision of social services and social security. It can further be concluded that social workers should be more available throughout the country, specifically in rural areas, to deliver social services as this could benefit the headers of child-headed households in rural areas who have limited knowledge about, and limited access to, social work services.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **It is recommended that:**

- Social workers should execute the provisions in the Children's Act pertaining to child-headed households in terms of prevention, early intervention and statutory services.
- Measures should be put in place to ensure that child-headed households have access to social security to alleviate their dire financial circumstances and to prevent them from being exposed to a variety of socio-economic issues.

- Enough resources and effective social service delivery should be made available to protect children's wellbeing in child-headed households.
- The employment of social workers should be addressed as a priority for the effective implementation of the Children's Act, especially in rural areas where there is a high incidence of child headed households This would be beneficial to child headed households in rural areas who have limited knowledge about social work services
- Communities should be educated about the procedures to be followed to assist child headed households in obtaining services.

#### **5.2.4.2 Theme 10: Rights as a header of child-headed household**

The majority of the participants indicated that they had limited knowledge about their rights as headers of child-headed households because they had always been headers and because no alternatives to their predicament had been provided to them. Some of the participants even indicated that they accepted their situation as headers of child-headed households and relegated the idea of rights as they could not foresee that anyone else would look after their households.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

It is concluded that most of the participants indicated that they had little knowledge of their rights as headers of child-headed households, or of the rights of every child to a family, or parental care, or to appropriate alternative care. The participants were under the impression that their lack of knowledge caused their rights to be infringed upon. It can also be concluded that these headers need a voice to articulate their needs and communicate their challenges to adult caregivers.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **It is recommended that:**

- The rights of children in child-headed households to education, health, recreation, and stable social and family structures should be promoted and protected. This can be done with awareness campaigns in schools and communities, specifically in areas where there is a high incidence of child-headed households.

- Social workers should, where necessary, take measures to assist children in child-headed households through appropriate support services based on comprehensive assessment as indicated in the Children's Act.
- Headers who are older than 18 years should be considered and investigated by social workers to see if they would be fit and proper as kinship foster parents as indicated in section 182 (2)(a-c) of the Children's Act. According to these sections it must be determined if the prospective foster parent is willing and able to take care of the child and also have the capacity to create an environment that is conducive to the child's growth and development. Since these headers have assumed these responsibilities from the age of 16, they could be found to be fit and proper to do so at the age of 19. This would then give these households access to the foster care grants.

#### **5.2.4.3 Theme 11: Important needs**

The majority of the participants indicated that their most important needs were material needs for basic items such as food, clothes, and shelter. All participants mentioned repeatedly that these types of material needs were important and that access to them would make their lives less challenging.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

It can be concluded that the most important needs for headers of child-headed households were food, shelter, and clothes. The need for food to be available was mentioned the most frequently and highlighted the importance of food in child-headed households. It can further be concluded that funding and resources should be allocated to NGOs to improve their capacity and to appoint more social workers to deal with the plight of child-headed households.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **It is recommended that:**

- The rights of children of child-headed households to adequate nutrition, clothing, and shelter should be effectively satisfied, through the implementation of the stipulations in existing legislation to ensure children's optimal physical and psychological growth

- Funding and resources should be made available to NGOs and the Department of Social Development to improve the capacity to appoint social workers to implement the stipulations in the Children's Act pertaining to child headed households to uphold the rights of this vulnerable group

#### **5.2.5 FURTHER RESEARCH**

This empirical investigation about the perceptions of headers of child-headed households and their experiences, suggests that further research should be done on the nature and scope of services rendered to child-headed households. It is also important to explore the reflections of service providers on this phenomenon. This investigation could also help shed light on the practical role that service providers play in child-headed households, since the Children's Act determines that appropriate support and services should be provided without having to remove the child from its existing placement of care.

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## APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT



UNIVERSITEIT  
STELLENBOSCH  
UNIVERSITY

### STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

---

#### TITLE:

**The experiences of headers of child-headed households in the Greater Sekhukhune District of the Limpopo province.**

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Mr. Niccoh Diago, a master's student from the Social Work Department at the University of Stellenbosch. The results of this study will become part of a research report. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a header of a child-headed household, which places you in an appropriate position to share your perceptions on the nature and circumstances of child-headed households as well as services rendered by services providers and to provide suitable recommendations on this topic.

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The aim of the study is to gain an in-depth understanding about the experiences of headers of child-headed households in the Greater Sekhukhune District of the Limpopo province, South Africa.

#### **2. PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following:

A semi-structured interview schedule will be utilised to gather information confidentially. You need not indicate your name or any particulars on the interview schedule. The schedule will be completed during a semi-structured telephone interview conducted by the researcher for a duration of 15 to 30 minutes

### **3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

Any uncertainties on any of the aspects of the schedule you may experience during the interview can be discussed and clarified at any time. Should the impact of the experiences you share during the interview, for instance loss of parents, challenges with every day functioning, and socio-economic difficulties amongst others, cause you emotional harm, the researcher would ensure that debriefing is arranged with a registered social worker (Mrs K.T Nkobo – 078 382 2140) who has agreed to provide debriefing services for as much as they are needed to research participants at a mutually convenient venue or at Bosele School for the Deaf and Blind. The services provided by the above-mentioned social worker will be free of charge, meaning that no payment will be expected from the potential participants.

### **4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS OR TO SOCIETY OR TO BOTH**

The results of the study will raise awareness and contribute to an in-depth understanding about the plight of headers of child-headed households for social workers, the Department of Social development, children's rights advocates, and the general public. Furthermore, the research will contribute essential information and an in-depth understanding about the experiences of headers of child-headed households as well as determine the type of services needed which could then lead to more effective social service delivery by social workers.

### **5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

No payment in any form will be received for participating in this study. Only R29 mobile airtime voucher will be given for gratitude.

### **6. CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained in that only the researcher will be aware of the identity of participants and completed interview

schedules will not be linked to any specific participants. All completed interview schedules will be managed, analysed and processed by the researcher and will be kept in a safe place in a locked cabinet accessible to the researcher only.

The interview will be audio taped. The participant can at any time ask to review the audiotape. The audiotape will be kept in the researcher's room, in a locked cabinet accessible to the researcher only. The recordings will be deleted after the researcher has transcribed and analysed the data.

Transcriptions will be safeguarded on the personal computer of the researcher with a password that is known only to the researcher as well as on the Microsoft One Drive. The study will be released by Stellenbosch University in the form of a thesis that is available for viewing to those who have access to the University's library website.

## **7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and remain in the study. The researcher may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise that warrant doing so, for example if you influence other participants in the completion of their questionnaires. Furthermore, if you decide to withdraw from the study once data has already been collected, the researcher will discontinue the participant's research activities and obliterate the collected data

## **8. IDENTIFICATION OF SUPERVISOR AND THE STUDENT-RESEARCHER**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the supervisor or student-researcher.

Supervisor: Dr M Strydom, Department of Social Work, University of Stellenbosch,  
Tel. 021-808 2070, e-mail: [mstrydom@sun.ac.za](mailto:mstrydom@sun.ac.za)

Researcher: Niccoh Diago

Cell. 0764289651, e-mail: [18987974@sun.ac.za](mailto:18987974@sun.ac.za)

## 9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact ms Maléne Fouché (tel. 021 808 4622, or e-mail: [mfouche@sun.ac.za](mailto:mfouche@sun.ac.za)) at the Division for Research Development.

<b>SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE</b>
--

The information above was described to the participant by the student-researcher, Niccoh Diago, in English and the participant is in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to the participant. The participant was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to the satisfaction of the participant.

I hereby agree to voluntarily participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_

**Name of participant**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of participant**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Date**

<b>SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR OR RESEARCHER</b>
--

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to \_\_\_\_\_[name the participant]. The participant was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in English and no translator was used.

\_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of investigator or researcher**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Date**

**APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE****UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH****SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

**The experiences of headers of child-headed households in the Greater Sekhukhune District of the Limpopo province**

**Researcher: Niccoh Diago**

---

**1. Profile of child-headed households**

Number of years as a header of the household	
Gender	
Current age	
Age when you became a header of the household	
Occupation	
Other family members (Siblings) that live in the household	
Age of other family members (siblings)	

## **2. Nature of child-headed households**

2.1 Tell me the reason that you became the header of the household, where are both parents (mother and father)? did they fall ill, pass away, migrant labourers or abandoned you, please explain thoroughly what happened?

2.2 Tell me about what happened in the time immediately after you were left with no parents? Who assisted, what did you do to survive in the household immediately after you were left with no parent, have you got family living nearby to you, who are they, are they assisting you, how are they assisting you?

2.3 What is your responsibility every day, what do you do on a random day from morning to evening, what are your roles in the house, tell me what your day looks like from getting up in the morning, until going to sleep at night? (who is responsible for what, breakfast, cleaning and buying food)?

2.4 Who assist you when you need help outside your household )? what do they do for you, how frequent do they do that, how often do they come, tell me about the assistance that they give? where do you go when you want to socialise, feel wanted?

2.5 What help would improve your everyday life, what help do you need, why this help?

## **3. Experiences of headers of child-headed households**

3.1 What do you see as a daily challenge in the household (what are your daily challenges on a random day, what challenges you?

3.2 Where do you get your income from; do you do any work for anyone for payment?



3.3 Tell me about your expenses, food, clothes, electricity? How much do you spend on food, clothes and electricity, what do you do when there is no food?

3.4 Tell me about the school, school going siblings??

3.5 What is your situation regarding going to school (current grade, grade finished, dropped out)?

3.6 Tell me about your experiences as the head of the household? what is it like for you to be the head of the household, what can you tell me?

#### **4. Social services needed**

4.1 Tell me about the services you received, are receiving? Who provided these services, from when, for how long, what are those services?

4.2 Are you aware of any services that should be rendered to you?

4.3 How do you see your rights as the header of a child-headed household? do you think your rights are infringed? what do you think is your legal right as the header of the household?

4.4 Name three most important needs?

4.5 Is there anything that you would like to add to the discussion? Anything that you feel we missed. Anything that you want to talk about?

**.....THANK YOU.....**

APPENDIX

C:CONFIRMATION

LETTER

APPENDIX C: CONFIRMATION LETTER



**Bosele**

SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF AND BLIND

Private Bag X128  
NEBO 1059

Tel: (013) 263 1002  
Fax: (013) 263 9083  
bosele.insti@mweb.co.za

To whom it may concern

**MASTERS STUDY: NICCOH DIAGO**

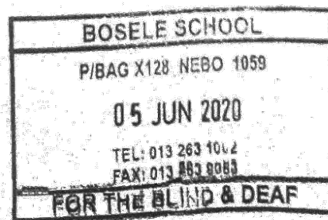
Herewith I, Konyane Tiny Nkobo confirm that I will be available to offer debriefing services to participants in connection to the research carried out by Mr. Niccoh Diago with research topic "EXPERIENCES OF HEADERS OF CHILD HEADED HOUSEHOLDS".

My involvement in this medium-risk study was explained to me by Mr. Niccoh Diago and all questions regarding my involvement were sufficiently answered.

Kind regards

Nkobo K.T.

*Nkobo K.T.*



Principal: Tema D.P

Deputy Principals: Digaoto L.M and Mafate C.E

HOODS: SENGISA C.M, Masemola L.C, Matsi M, Madras N.S and Madubanya M.E

## APPENDIX D: CONFIDENTIAL LETTER, POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS



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### Letter of invitation to partake in the research study:

#### **The experiences of headers of child-headed households in the Greater Sekhukhune District of the Limpopo province.**

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Dear potential participant,

This letter is to invite you to participate in the research study about the experiences of headers of child-headed households in the Greater Sekhukhune District of the Limpopo province. The study is done to provide a comprehensive understanding about the plight of headers of child-headed households, as well as the services they need to support them. The researcher is interested to interview headers of child-headed households between the ages of 19 and 22 years through the telephone interview.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You can choose not to participate and there are no consequences. You may also withdraw your consent to participate at any time. Furthermore, your participation will remain anonymous and confidential. It is important to know that no one should coerce you into participating in the study. No payment will be given for partaking in the study, you will only be given R29 mobile airtime voucher for gratitude. If you decide to take part in the study, you are welcome to call, text or email the researcher. Thank you.



Vriendelike Groete/Kind regards/Ngemibuliso Emihle

**Nicco Diago** | B In Social Work | M of Social Work

HRBH Forum 2020 | Huis Russel Botman House | Stellenbosch University

e: [18987974@sun.ac.za](mailto:18987974@sun.ac.za) | c: +27 76 428 9651 | o: +27 21 808 9594 | a: 7 Marais Street | Stellenbosch 7600

**APPENDIX E: REC RESEARCH APPROVAL****NOTICE OF APPROVAL**

REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (SBER) - Initial Application Form

11 June 2020

Project number: 14481

Project Title: The experiences of headers of child-headed households in the Greater Sekhukhune district of the Limpopo province.  
Dear Mr Nicco Diago

Your REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (SBER) - Initial Application Form submitted on 8 June 2020 was reviewed and approved by the REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (REC: SBE).

Please note below expiration date of this approved submission:

**Ethics approval period:**

Protocol approval date (Humanities)	Protocol expiration date (Humanities)
11 June 2020	10 June 2021

**SUSPENSION OF PHYSICAL CONTACT RESEARCH DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting lockdown measures, all research activities requiring physical contact or being in undue physical proximity to human participants has been suspended by Stellenbosch University. Please refer to a [formal statement](#) issued by the REC: SBE on 20 March for more information on this.

This suspension will remain in force until such time as the social distancing requirements are relaxed by the national authorities to such an extent that in-person data collection from participants will be allowed. This will be confirmed by a new statement from the REC: SBE on the university's dedicated [Covid-19 webpage](#).

Until such time online or virtual data collection activities, individual or group interviews conducted via online meeting or web conferencing tools, such as Skype or Microsoft Teams are strongly encouraged in all SU research environments.

If you are required to amend your research methods due to this suspension, please submit an amendment to the REC: SBE as soon as possible. The instructions on how to submit an amendment to the REC can be found on this webpage: [\[instructions\]](#), or you can contact the REC Helpdesk for instructions on how to submit an amendment: [applyethics@sun.ac.za](mailto:applyethics@sun.ac.za).

**GENERAL REC COMMENTS PERTAINING TO THIS PROJECT:****INVESTIGATOR RESPONSIBILITIES**

Please take note of the General Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

**If the researcher deviates in any way from the proposal approved by the REC: SBE, the researcher must notify the REC of these changes.**

Please use your SU project number (14481) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your project.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

### **CONTINUATION OF PROJECTS AFTER REC APPROVAL PERIOD**

You are required to submit a progress report to the REC: SBE before the approval period has expired if a continuation of ethics approval is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary).

Once you have completed your research, you are required to submit a final report to the REC: SBE for review.

#### **Included Documents:**

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Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Default	DIAGO DESC REPORT	06/02/2020	06/02/2020
Data collection tool	INTERVIEW SCHEDULE	30/04/2020	2
Recruitment material	Letter of invitation (confidential)	01/06/2020	
Informed Consent Form	Informed Consent	01/06/2020	
Budget	Budget	01/06/2020	doc
Research Protocol/Proposal	NICCOH DIAGO RESEARCH PROPOSAL after edit	08/06/2020	Word
Letter of support_counselling	Confirmation letter	08/06/2020	pdf
Proof of permission	Gatekeeper permission	08/06/2020	pdf
Default	RESPONSE LETTER	08/06/2020	Word

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at [cgraham@sun.ac.za](mailto:cgraham@sun.ac.za).

Sincerely,

Clarissa Graham

REC Coordinator: Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioral and Education Research

*National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number: REC-050411-032.*

*The Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioural and Education Research complies with the SA National Health Act No.61 2003 as it pertains to health research. In addition, this committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research established by the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) and the Department of Health Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.) 2015. Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.*

## Principal Investigator Responsibilities

### Protection of Human Research Participants

As soon as Research Ethics Committee approval is confirmed by the REC, the principal investigator (PI) is responsible for the following:

**Conducting the Research:** The PI is responsible for making sure that the research is conducted according to the REC-approved research protocol. The PI is jointly responsible for the conduct of co-investigators and any research staff involved with this research. The PI must ensure that the research is conducted according to the recognised standards of their research field/discipline and according to the principles and standards of ethical research and responsible research conduct.

**Participant Enrolment:** The PI may not recruit or enrol participants unless the protocol for recruitment is approved by the REC. Recruitment and data collection activities must cease after the expiration date of REC approval. All recruitment materials must be approved by the REC prior to their use.

**Informed Consent:** The PI is responsible for obtaining and documenting affirmative informed consent using **only** the REC-approved consent documents/process, and for ensuring that no participants are involved in research prior to obtaining their affirmative informed consent. The PI must give all participants copies of the signed informed consent documents, where required. The PI must keep the originals in a secured, REC-approved location for at least five (5) years after the research is complete.

**Continuing Review:** The REC must review and approve all REC-approved research proposals at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk but not less than once per year. There is **no grace period**. Prior to the date on which the REC approval of the research expires, **it is the PI's responsibility to submit the progress report in a timely fashion to ensure a lapse in REC approval does not occur**. Once REC approval of your research lapses, all research activities must cease, and contact must be made with the REC immediately.

**Amendments and Changes:** Any planned changes to any aspect of the research (such as research design, procedures, participant population, informed consent document, instruments, surveys or recruiting material, etc.), must be submitted to the REC for review and approval before implementation. Amendments may not be initiated without first obtaining written REC approval. The **only exception** is when it is necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants and the REC should be immediately informed of this necessity.

**Adverse or Unanticipated Events:** Any serious adverse events, participant complaints, and all unanticipated problems that involve risks to participants or others, as well as any research-related injuries, occurring at this institution or at other performance sites must be reported to the REC within **five (5) days** of discovery of the incident. The PI must also report any instances of serious or continuing problems, or non-compliance with the RECs requirements for protecting human research participants.

**Research Record Keeping:** The PI must keep the following research-related records, at a minimum, in a secure location for a minimum of five years: the REC approved research proposal and all amendments; all informed consent documents; recruiting materials; continuing review reports; adverse or unanticipated events; and all correspondence and approvals from the REC.

**Provision of Counselling or emergency support:** When a dedicated counsellor or a psychologist provides



support to a participant without prior REC review and approval, to the extent permitted by law, such activities will not be recognised as research nor the data used in support of research. Such cases should be indicated in the progress report or final report.

**Final reports:** When the research is completed (no further participant enrolment, interactions or interventions), the PI must submit a Final Report to the REC to close the study.

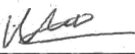
**On-Site Evaluations, Inspections, or Audits:** If the researcher is notified that the research will be reviewed or audited by the sponsor or any other external agency or any internal group, the PI must inform the REC immediately of the impending audit/evaluation.



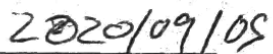
## APPENDIX F

### INDEPENDANT CODER DECLARATION

I, Tirelo Mtombeni, hereby declare that I read through the semi-structured interviews and empirical research chapter of Niccoh Diago (the researcher) and that my findings correspond with the themes, subthemes and categories as suggested in the empirical study.

  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signature

  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date